HEAD START TO KINDERGARTEN
TRANSITIONS PROJECT

REPORT

Understanding Cross-System Transitions from Head Start to Kindergarten

A Comparative Cross Case Study of Head Start and K-12 Partnerships

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements vii

Overview ix

Introduction ix

Research Questions ix

Purpose x

Key Findings and Highlights xi

Methods xii

Implications xii

Executive Summary ES1

Research Questions ES2

Sample & Methods ES3

Key Findings ES6

Implications ES10

Glossary

Chapter 1: Background and Study Overview 1

Introduction 1

Case Study Design 9

Limitations of Interpretations Based on Case Study Methods 23

Chapter 2: Context of the Cases 25

Introduction 25

Understanding Cross-System Alignment: A Focus on Vertical vs. Horizonal Alignment 30

Chapter 3: Perspectives on Transitions to Kindergarten 33

Key Takeaways 33

Introduction 33

Transition Timelines and Milestones 35

Definitions of Transition Success and Perceived Outcomes for Children, Families, and Staff 39

Misalignment in Standards and Expectations Between Head Start and Kindergarten 58

Chapter 4: Policies to Support Transitions 66
Key Takeaways 66
Introduction 66
Findings: Transition-Related Policies 69

Chapter 5: Transition Practices, Strategies, and Professional Supports 81
Key Takeaways 81
Introduction 81
Transition-Related Practices and Strategies 82
Transition-Related Professional Supports 96
Degree of Alignment in Transition Practices and Professional Supports Across the Systems 97

Chapter 6: Cross-System Partnerships and Collaboration in Support of Transitions ... 99
Key Takeaways 99
Introduction 99
Coordination Between Head Start Programs and LEAs to Support Transitions 100
Staff Working Relationships and Collaboration to Support Transitions 114
Partnerships with Community Organizations and Intermediary Agencies 123

Chapter 7: Synthesis of Factors that Influence Transitions 127
Key Takeaways 127
Introduction 127

Chapter 8: Implications 132
Introduction 132
Synthesis of Cases by the 4Ps 132
How Findings “Align” with Existing Research and Theory 138
How This Study Informs the HS2K Theory of Change 144
Implications for Policy & Practice 146
How Can Future Research Continue to Address Gaps in our Knowledge on Kindergarten Transitions? 148

References 150

Appendix A: Additional Information on Recruitment Process 157
Recruitment of Cases 157

Recruitment of Staff Within Case Study Sites 158

Appendix B: Final Codebooks 159

Appendix C: Case-Specific Results from the Staff Collaboration Survey 177

Case 1 177

Case 2 181

Case 3 185

Case 4 189

Case 5 193

List of Figures

Figure 1. Components of the Kindergarten Transition 4
Figure 2. Head Start to Kindergarten (HS2K) Transition Landscape 6
Figure 3. HS2K Theory of Change 8
Figure 4. The HS2K 4Ps 9
Figure 5. Data Collection Timeline 14
Figure 6. Head Start-LEA Configurations 26
Figure 7. Which Case Participants Included Co-location and Had Blended pre-K Classrooms 27
Figure 8. Two Types of Alignment 31
Figure 9. Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results Across Cases 118
Figure 10. Roles of an Intermediary 123
Figure C-1. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 1 178
Figure C-2. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 2 182
Figure C-3. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 3 186
Figure C-4. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 4 190
Figure C-5. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 5 194

List of Tables

Table E-1. Case Characteristics 3

Table 1. Types of Documents Provided by and Reviewed for Each Case 16

Table 2. Interview and Focus Group Protocol Constructs and Topic Areas 18

Table 3. Number of Participants by Case and Role 19

Table 4. Information on Each Case 28

Table 5. Summary of Transition Timeline and Milestones by Case 37

Table 6. Illustrative Quotes about Perceived Outcomes for Children & Families 41

Table 7. Perceived Benefits or Outcomes for Children & Families 48

Table 8. Illustrative Quotes about Perceived Outcomes for Teachers and Staff 51

Table 9. Perceived Benefits or Outcomes for Teachers and Staff 55

Table 10. Examples of Transition Practices and Strategies Reported by Participants 84

Table 11. Length of partnership and the instrumental support provided by Head Start and by LEAs as a condition of the partnership 104

Table 12. Cross-System Meeting Structures 110

Table 13. Number of Participants to the Staff Collaboration Survey by Title and Case 115

Table 14. Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results by Case 121

Table 15. List of Community Organizations and Agencies and their Roles by Case 123

Table 16. Summary of Case Activity by the 4Ps 133

Table B-1. Family Focus Groups Codebook 159

Table B-2. Transition Codebook 164

Table B-3. Family Engagement in Transition Process Codebook 167

Table B-4. Partnerships Codebook 169

Table B-5. Policies Codebook 172

Table B-6. Reflections Codebook 175

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Overview

Introduction

The Understanding Children's Transitions from Head Start to Kindergarten (HS2K) Project was a multi-year project funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. The purpose of this project was to better understand how to improve children's transitions from Head Start programs to elementary schools. The transition to kindergarten occurs within and between two distinct systems (early care and education [ECE] and K-12 education) that each work under their own governance structures, philosophies, and accountability metrics. Specifically, this project aimed to explore the definition of "successful transitions" from a multi-level and systemic perspective.

Within the context of this project, we focus on one type of ECE program—Head Start. Head Start is embedded within a broader "ECE system" that includes many other types of programs, including state-funded pre-k, child care, home-based care, friend and family care, and privately-funded centers. However, because we are studying Head Start, we are thinking about the Head Start system as the "sending side." Kindergarten is embedded within what we call the "K-12 system" and is what we consider to be the "receiving side" of the kindergarten transition.

This report details findings from one component of the HS2K Project – a comparative multi-case study of five Head Start and Local Education Agency (LEA) partnerships, including their families, Head Start teachers and leaders, kindergarten teachers, elementary school leaders, LEA leaders, and community partners. Our case-specific descriptions should be read as in-depth illustrations of the inner workings of kindergarten transition processes as they existed and were implemented in context at the time of data collection.

Research Questions

1. What **strategies and practices** are Head Start programs and elementary schools implementing to support children as they transition from Head Start to kindergarten? What is the content, quality, and quantity of these strategies and practices? How are they experienced/perceived by children, families, teachers, and other direct service providers?

2. What characterizes **relationships/partnerships** among Head Start programs, elementary schools, and other community partners that support children's successful transitions from Head Start to kindergarten? What are the specific facilitators of, and barriers to, successful transitions?
3. What are the key *perceived* **short- and long-term outcomes** of transition strategies and practices for children, families, Head Start teachers, and kindergarten teachers? What are the key contextual factors and mechanisms that result in these *perceived* key outcomes?

Purpose

When children transition from Head Start to kindergarten, they may face different environments and expectations, which can cause disequilibrium and challenges for young children who benefit from routines. These kindergarten transitions occur within a broader context of distinctly different systems, with differing and sometimes contradictory governance structures, policies, philosophies, and accountability metrics.

To date, much of what is known about supporting children's transition to kindergarten narrowly attends to the classroom-level practices implemented by ECE programs and kindergarten teachers separately. There has been limited attention on the multi-layered perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices—what we call "the 4Ps"—within and across the ECE and K-12 systems that are also needed to adequately support these transitions.



The HS2K Case Study was designed to help address gaps in the literature and further explore and refine the HS2K theory of change that was informed by literature and practice knowledge. This study is one of the first to focus on the kindergarten

transitions, professional supports, and practices from multiple perspectives across the two systems that influence transitions. Through this study, we aim to provide holistic and rich descriptions of the strategies, relationships, and practices supporting kindergarten transitions across selected partnerships between Head Start and K-12 entities. In doing so, we aim to better understand the complex ecology influencing the experiences of children and their families.

Key Findings and Highlights

This study was the first to deeply explore approaches to kindergarten transitions from two systems that straddle that transition period—Head Start and K-12. By exploring existing partnerships, we were able to collect data from numerous members of the educational community within the specific locales of our cases. This offers an opportunity to better understand alignment in perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices within these communities—both within systems and across systems. The following represent some of the key findings of this study:

- Most of the cases relied heavily on **relationships to sustain partnerships**, especially at the leadership level, rather than on policies to drive transition efforts. However, relationships are subject to breakdowns when people leave positions or change jobs over time.
- Most transition efforts were **practices and strategies focused on children and familie**s, and **within-system practices** were more common than practices that connected the two systems together. In addition, none of the cases focused on providing **joint professional supports** as a mechanism for supporting and sustaining transition efforts.
- Some cases had more alignment and/or activity in one or more of the 4Ps than others. In other words, not every partnership was strong in each of the 4Ps and some cases focused more on one or two of the Ps than on all four.
- Strong cross-system partnerships take **committed leaders** from both Head Start and LEAs who are focused on supporting transitions and alignment across the systems.
- Using **common and aligned frameworks and assessments** in Head Start (along with other preschool programs) and in kindergarten helps provide **a common language** that supports kindergarten transition practices and strategies across the systems.
- It was important for cases to formalize approaches to kindergarten transitions and opportunities for collaboration across the systems in policies such as **MOUs and/or other policy documents**.

Methods

This study represents five cases, each inclusive of a Head Start-LEA partnership. We interviewed Head Start and LEA staff from each case that were involved in supporting Head Start to kindergarten transition efforts. We conducted interviews with Head Start and LEA staff and focus groups with Head Start parents from our five cases between April and September 2022, and held follow-up interviews with a subset of focus group parents following their child's transition to kindergarten from December 2022 through January 2023.

Topics of interviews and focus groups included background for staff (e.g., role and responsibilities), perspectives on the transition and transition supports, family engagement in the transition processes, transition policies, partnerships between Head Start programs and district/elementary schools, and final reflections. We also asked participants to describe the composition and structure of the people and community partners they work with directly around transitions, both within and across systems. We used both deductive and inductive techniques to code the interview and focus group data, and findings from the five individual case studies formed the basis of the cross-case analyses presented in this report.

In addition to interviews, we collected relevant documents (i.e., MOUs, parent handbooks, event flyers) and asked each Head Start and LEA staff member we interviewed to complete a short staff collaboration survey. Staff collaboration surveys were intended to provide a better understanding of the professional relationship structure within each case including the types of staff within and across systems who collaborate with each other to support the transition process.

Implications

While providing an in-depth descriptive look at transitions within five cases, our study findings highlight the diverse approaches to partnerships and transition perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices. Understanding that communities are in very different places with their partnerships and approaches, some implications that are rooted in our findings include:

For Policy & Practice

- **Head Start-LEA Partners Started Their Work in Different Places:** Some of the Cases in the study had longstanding relationships, while others were newer. Some had existing relationships primarily focused on special education or horizontal alignment with district preschool programs, but little focus on transitions. Some cases had MOUs that were used to inform practices, and in other cases most

participants knew little about the contents of their MOUs—particularly non-leadership staff. However, there is something to be learned from each of these cases: No one partnership has it all figured out, and that is likely to be true of many partnerships. Case study partners worked to build upon the strengths they each had.

- **Head Start-LEA Partners Invested in Activities Aimed at Building and Sustaining Relationships**: Relationships take time and effort to cultivate and maintain. An important implication of this study is to ensure that Head Start staff and kindergarten staff—from the classroom up to the leadership levels—have ample opportunities to connect and communicate with one another in shared spaces. Examples mentioned by study participants included placing classrooms close to each other, creating opportunities for joint professional development, and making the time for staff to visit each other's classrooms or buildings.
- **Shared Professional Supports and Joint Planning Opportunities across Head Start and K-12 are Still a Work in Progress**: We did not find any instances of shared professional supports across partners within our cases. Based on our prior review of the existing knowledge base (Ehrlich et al., 2021), this seems like a promising area for policymakers and educational administrators to explore. Increasing opportunities and incentives for shared trainings that focus on transitions might in turn help with the development of relationships across systems.
- **Many Approaches to Partnerships and Supporting Kindergarten Transitions were Not Written into Policy**: Relationships are necessary to support successful transition approaches; however, they are subject to breaking down over time when people leave positions or change jobs. For example, some participants discussed the importance of formalizing approaches to kindergarten transition in policies such as MOUs and other policy documents as a way to make transition supports systematic.

For Research

- Future research could provide a more comprehensive examination of places where true vertical alignment is occurring between Head Start (or other ECE programs) and kindergarten. This would enable the field to gain a better awareness of how the 4Ps may be shared or aligned in those locales.
- It would be valuable to investigate whether there are locales with more prevalent cross-system/joint professional supports that bring together leaders or classroom staff that serve both preschool and kindergarten students. If so, do these experiences lead to smoother transitions and better outcomes for children, families, and educators?
- Given that intermediaries and community partners played important (but different) roles in most of our cases, more research is needed to understand these roles and how they facilitate cross-system relationships, and/or play other roles in community transition processes.

Executive Summary

The Understanding Children's Transitions from Head Start to Kindergarten (HS2K) Project (contract HHSP233201500048I, task orders 75P00119F37016 and 75N98022F00247) was a multi-year project funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. The purpose of this project was to better understand how to improve children's transitions from Head Start programs to elementary schools. The transition to kindergarten occurs within and between two distinct systems (early care and education [ECE] and K-12 education) that each work under their own governance structures, philosophies, and accountability metrics. Specifically, this project aimed to explore the definition of "successful transitions" from a multi-level and systemic perspective. There has been limited attention on the multi-layered perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices (which we call the 4Ps) within and across the ECE and K-12 systems that are needed to adequately support these transitions.

Within the context of this project, we are focusing on one type of ECE program—Head Start. Head Start is embedded within a broader "ECE system" that includes many other types of programs, including state-funded pre-k, child care, home-based care, friend and family care, and privately-funded centers. However, because we are studying Head Start, we are thinking about the Head Start system as the "sending side." Kindergarten is embedded within what we call the "K-12 system." In this project, this is the public school system that encompasses kindergarten through grade 12. This is what we consider to be the "receiving side" of the kindergarten transition. With recent movements to embed pre-kindergarten classrooms within schools, the distinction between ECE systems and K-12 systems has become much less clear. In some locales, pre-k is funded by and overseen by the same leaders as other elementary school grades, suggesting they are part of the K-12 system. In other locales, even if located within school buildings, ECE programs are run by different leaders—and driven by different standards than kindergarten. However, for the purposes of understanding this comparative case study, we consider the K-12 system to be a distinct system from the Head Start system.

This report details findings from one component of the HS2K Project – a comparative multi-case study of five Head Start and LEA partnerships. We selected and highlighted these five cases because the partnerships were pre-existing and there were indications that they were engaging in promising approaches to supporting transitions. The study focused on the five Head Start-Local Education Agency (LEA) partnerships, including their families, Heart Start teachers and leaders, kindergarten teachers, elementary

school leaders, LEA leaders, and community partners. We refer to a Head Start and LEA partnership as a bounded system "case" and the individual Head Start grantees, delegates, or centers, and LEAs or elementary schools within these cases as "sites." Our case-specific descriptions should be read as in-depth illustrations of the inner workings of kindergarten transition processes as they existed and were implemented in context at the time of data collection.

Research Questions

Through these case studies, we explored the multiple settings and multi-directional influences on children's, families', and teachers' transition-related experiences. The case studies focused on addressing components of the project's overall research questions:

1. What **strategies and practices** are Head Start programs and elementary schools implementing to support children as they transition from Head Start to kindergarten? What is the content, quality, and quantity of these strategies and practices? How are they experienced/perceived by children, families, teachers, and other direct service providers?
2. What characterizes **relationships/partnerships** among Head Start programs, elementary schools, and other community partners that support children's successful transitions from Head Start to kindergarten? What are the specific facilitators of, and barriers to, successful transitions?
3. What are the key *perceived* **short- and long-term outcomes** of transition strategies and practices for children, families, Head Start teachers, and kindergarten teachers? What are the key contextual factors and mechanisms that result in these *perceived* key outcomes?

The case studies addressed these HS2K Project research questions by examining several "moderators" including transition practices and approaches as experienced by children, families, and staff (RQ1). Throughout this study, we also discerned how transition approaches varied based on different configurations among Head Start grantees/delegates, Head Start centers, elementary schools, and LEAs, as well as other contextual factors that facilitated or impeded meaningful collaboration (RQ2, RQ3). Lastly, we explored staff and families' perceptions of short- and longer-term outcomes of transition-related efforts (RQ3).

Sample & Methods

In the fall of 2020 and again in 2021 (after a delay due to COVID-19), the research team released a solicitation for nominations of known Head Start-LEA partnerships that implement innovative or promising transition strategies and practices. We received a total of 17 nominations. The research team reviewed nominations in collaboration with OPRE. To identify top candidates, we considered the following selection criteria: (1) Pre-existing relationship between the Head Start and LEA, (2) Indication of innovative and/or promising approaches/practices, (3) Urbanicity, (4) Inter-organizational configurations, and (5) Geographic locale. By inter-organizational configuration, we mean the constitutions of Head Start programs/centers and LEAs/school districts that share feeder patterns of children between Head Start and kindergarten. These configurations vary across partnerships. For example, configurations may include:

- One-to-Many: There is only one Head Start program in an area. Head Start children from one Head Start program enroll in kindergarten in multiple schools within multiple LEAs (which can be of the same or different school(s) from where Head Start classroom(s) are co-located).
- Many-to-One: Head Start children from multiple Head Start programs may disperse into multiple elementary schools within one LEA. The LEA also receives children from multiple Head Start programs.
- Many-to-Many: Children from multiple Head Start programs enroll in kindergarten in multiple LEAs; LEA receives children from multiple Head Start programs.

Table E-1 is a high-level summary of the characteristics of each of our cases.

Table E-1. Case Characteristics

Case	Head Start Agency Type	Configuration	Urban-icity	Location	Community Served	ECE Delivery Model
1	Non-Profit Community Action Agency (CAA)	One-to-Many: One Head Start grant recipient sends children to four different LEAs	Rural Small	Midwest	Predominantly White, English speaking	Mixed Delivery with Head Start and state and other types of funded pre-k in same classroom in elementary school

Case	Head Start Agency Type	Configuration	Urban-icity	Location	Community Served	ECE Delivery Model
2	Non-Profit Community Action Program (CAP)	One-to-Many: One Head Start grant recipient sends children to five different LEAs	Town, Remote	Midwest	LEA-a predominantly White with growing Native American population LEA-b, evenly split between White and Native American families	Mixed Delivery with Head Start and state-funded pre-k in same classroom in elementary school
3	Non-Profit Community Action Agency (CAA)	Many-to-One: Many Head Start grant recipients and children can enroll in multiple schools within one LEA	City Large	Western	White, Latino, Asian Pacific, AIAN, Native Hawaiian, Black and a growing immigrant population	Only Head Start classroom within elementary school
4	Private, non-profit corporation	Many-to-Many: Many Head Start grant recipients send children to many different LEAs	Suburb Large	Eastern	Predominantly Hispanic and/or Latino, with a smaller portion of White and Black families; a small population of Spanish speakers	Mixed Delivery with Head Start and state-funded pre-k in same classroom in elementary school
5	Non-Profit Community Action Agency (CAA)	One-to-Many: One Head Start grant recipient sends children to many different LEAs in the same county	City Midsize	Western	Predominantly Hispanic and/or Latino, with a high population of Spanish speakers	Mixed Delivery with Head Start and state-funded pre-k in same classroom in elementary school

We interviewed Head Start and LEA staff from each case that were involved in supporting Head Start to kindergarten transition efforts (*n*=57). We conducted interviews with Head Start and LEA staff at multiple levels of both systems, and focus groups with

Head Start parents (*n*=6) at each of the five cases between April and September 2022. From December 2022 through January 2023, we conducted follow-up interviews with a subset of focus group parents (*n*=5) following their child's transition to kindergarten. Interviews and focus groups lasted between 45 and 90 minutes depending on an individual's role. Topics included background for staff (e.g., role and responsibilities), perspectives on the transition and transition supports, family engagement in the transition process, transition policies, partnerships between Head Start programs and district/elementary schools, and final reflections. We also asked participants to describe the composition and structure of the people and community partners they work with directly around transitions, both within and across systems. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

In addition to interviews, we asked each Head Start and LEA staff member to complete a short staff collaboration survey (*n*=47). Surveys were intended to provide a better understanding of the professional relationship structure within each case, including the types of staff within and across systems who collaborate with each other to support the transition process. Finally, we collected relevant documents (i.e., MOUs, parent handbooks, event flyers, etc.; *n*=14) from each case to aid our understanding of their policies and practices, organizational relationships, and the nature of information shared with families.

We used both deductive and inductive techniques to code the interview and focus group data. Case study leads developed a codebook of a priori codes based on the research questions and HS2K theory of change. After completing coding (using Dedoose) the team retrieved coded data relevant to the research questions. Coding teams created separate analytic memos aligned with the research questions that contained detailed summaries of responses with quotations. These analytic memos served as the foundation for individual case study writeups that addressed multiple topics: the definition of a successful transition to kindergarten; alignment of the 4Ps within- and across systems; transition practices and strategies, including professional supports; partnerships and relationships to support transitions across systems; transition-related policies; and perceived short- and long-term outcomes of transition strategies and practices. Findings from the five individual case studies formed the basis of the cross-case analyses presented here.

While our case studies cannot produce generalizable knowledge, nor make any causal connections between transition efforts or activities and student or family outcomes, our study illustrates system-level perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices from both sides of the Head Start to kindergarten transition. This study also provides an in-depth exploration of partnerships and the nature of relationships at different levels both across and within the Head Start and K-12 systems.

Key Findings

This study was the first to deeply explore approaches to kindergarten transitions from two systems that straddle that transition period—Head Start and K-12. By exploring existing partnerships, we were able to collect data from numerous members of the educational community within a specific locale to understand the similarities and differences that emerged both within systems but across levels, and across those two systems. This offers an opportunity to better understand alignment in perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices within these communities. The following are key findings of this study:

Transition Perspectives (RQs 1 and 3)

- Most staff and parents in the sample perceived that the Head Start to kindergarten transition had a definitive start and talked about specific milestones that marked the start of the transition.
- Staff across cases shared their own personal perceptions of transition time (i.e., points and milestones) rather than identifying or relying upon an institutional or agreed-upon definition of when transitions begin and end; this suggests that there were no official or agreed-upon definitions in the cases.
- Participants across the cases perceived that a successful transition, among other things, meant making sure that children were "kindergarten ready."
- In one of the cases, expectations and perspectives on kindergarten readiness were aligned between Head Start and the LEA; in the other cases, there were differences in beliefs between Head Start and LEAs.
- LEA staff perspectives on successful transition outcomes for children and families focused more on academic skills than on social-emotional skills.
- In four of the five cases, when staff were asked to describe cross-system alignment efforts, they primarily described aligning curriculum and assessments between Head Start and other pre-k programs within schools—or *horizontal alignment* (sometimes called "within-grade level" alignment). However, the primary focus of this study was to learn about cross-system alignment between the Head Start system and kindergarten, within the K-12 system (*vertical alignment*). Alignment efforts between Head Start and kindergarten were present but described less frequently in these particular cases.

Transition Policies (RQ 1)

- Case study findings showed that many transition practices and strategies were not written into explicit documentation, but that informal policies or expectations exist.

- In cases with strong partnerships (i.e., cross-system aligned transition vision and goals, clear expectations for how both systems will work together to support transitions), there was less written guidance in the form of policies and more reliance on relationships at the leadership level. Given this, transition efforts may be less sustainable over time when there is staff turnover.
- Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between Head Start and LEAs were a common way to document cross-system decisions and policy. However, in some locales, only the highest-level administrators could speak to their contents in detail.

Transition Practices & Professional Supports (RQ 1)

- Practices, such as information sharing and transition-focused family events (reported across cases in the study), were similar to what we know from other research: Most focused on children and families, and within-system practices are more common than practices that connect the two systems together.
- Head Start and LEA practices seemed more aligned when the programs were co-located in the same building, offering ease of both formal and informal communication that could occur prior to, during, and after the kindergarten transition.
- Even in cases with existing cross-system partnerships, there was little evidence of cross-system or joint professional supports (i.e., professional development or training opportunities), whereby Head Start and kindergarten staff had common time together focused on supporting kindergarten transitions.

Partnerships to Support Transitions (RQ 2)

- Understanding how transitions were supported by partnerships required an awareness of how higher level leadership staff in Head Start and LEAs developed relationships and set up structures, rather than just focusing on relationships at the building or classroom levels. Some partnerships were sparked by larger initiatives that brought leadership staff from Head Start and LEAs together, while other partnerships relied on individual staff initiative.
- Partnerships between Head Start and LEAs were formed to join the two systems to support families and children living in the communities being served and not specifically to help support transitions. However, through these partnerships, the contributions from each of the systems helped to align and support the experiences of children and families as they transition from one system into the other.
- Some partnerships were longstanding, while others began more recently. Overall, we did not find that the length of the cross-system partnership necessarily signified the strength of the partnerships.

Key Factors Influencing Transitions (RQ 2)

- Having committed leadership that focused on supporting transition and alignment from both Head Start and the LEA was valuable in building strong cross-system collaboration.
- Common and aligned frameworks and assessments helped provide a common language that supports kindergarten transition practices across the systems.
- Convening and meeting on a regular basis at multiple levels helped reinforce responsibilities and practices across the partnerships.
- Having committed leaders from both Head Start and the LEA that focused on supporting transition and alignment created greater buy-in and support for partnering around transitions.
- Dedicated staff, resources, and funding streams supported collaborative efforts between Head Start and kindergarten. Whereas (in both systems)not having dedicated staff who were focused on coordination across the partnership limited the implementation of transition practices and cross-system alignment.
- One-to-many and many-to-many configurations made creating and sustaining relationships across staff more difficult than a one-to-one configuration. These two configurations also presented transition challenges for children and families. For example, a Head Start program may not have access to transportation to all feeder elementary schools within the partner LEA, making pre-kindergarten school visits more difficult for some families and children.
- Staff turnover inhibited information sharing and relationship development, which can interrupt established practices or partnerships.

Overall, findings from this comparative case study indicate that participants' perspectives—on the timing of transitions, their role in supporting transitions, and their understanding of kindergarten readiness—was strongly influenced by their interactions with children and families. For example, teachers(in both systems)were more likely than other staff to identify a concrete starting point for when transitions began (e.g., the year prior to kindergarten) and/or end point. Administrators and managers/coordinators talked about the transition as being much more fluid, always an ongoing process. This may be influenced by the concrete touchpoints teachers have with children and their families—and the limited timeframe they have to work with them. In addition, both Head Start and K-12 participants referenced differences in preschool vs. kindergarten; Head Start centered on developmentally appropriate practices that included a focus on whole-child development while kindergarten staff centered on skills, whether academic or social-emotional.

Through participants' sharing of their own perspectives, our case studies provide more concrete evidence—than prior research has shown— that policies can contribute to staff becoming more aligned in their perspectives and sets of expectations. Standards and

codified expectations help to promote educators' views on their roles, what children should be learning, how staff should be supporting children and families, and what role others play in those processes (including parents, the local community, and other partners). However, there is little evidence that policies are currently driving professional supports, as noted above, or even that staff think about policies as explicitly driving practices that Head Start program staff and LEA educators implement.

While coordinated practices are promising, most were initiated by either Head Start or the LEA and the other party was merely invited to participate rather than co-construct (e.g., one system hosting a transition-related event and inviting the other system to join). Joint planning takes time and intentionality and, overall, we did not find many practices that included planning across systems. This level of collaboration may need additional supports such as resources, joint planning time/professional development focused on transitions (which we found to be lacking both within and across Head Start and LEAs), and policies that can support practices and relationships such as written responsibilities outlined in an MOU. While not sufficient in and of itself, some findings did indicate that co-location may help facilitate this type of collaboration. Overall, Head Start and LEA practices seemed more aligned when the programs were co-located in the same building, offering ease of both formal and informal communication that could occur prior to, during, and after the kindergarten transition. It is also possible that co-located programs already have other structures that support collaboration such as similar schedules, leadership, and school/building-level policies and practices that are conducive to collaborative planning. In our five cases, there was limited evidence of cross-system professional supports (i.e., training, professional development, coaching). Therefore, we come away from this study with no clear systematic understanding of whether joint professional development would or could help to overcome the different perspectives held by staff in these two systems. This is a continued area for future research and practice efforts.

When asked about cross-system efforts or alignment, in four out of the five cases staff were much more likely to think about the horizontal alignment between Head Start and the LEA *at the preschool level* (i.e., how Head Start staff were working collaboratively with preschool staff situated within the elementary school(s) or how leaders were working to align language, expectations, curricula, and assessment between Head Start and school-based- often state-funded- pre-k). There was much less discussion—or indication of active efforts—occurring between Head Start and kindergarten staff. Thus, the relationships formed between Head Start programs and LEAs seemed to prioritize connections among different preschool programs—a form of horizontal (within-grade) alignment. While those working in practice may not be surprised by this finding, it has not been highlighted in prior research and is an important contribution to our understanding of alignment efforts.

Implications

While providing an in-depth descriptive look at transitions within five cases, our study findings highlight the diverse approaches to partnerships and transition perspectives, policies, professional supports and practices. Understanding that communities are in very different places with their partnerships and approaches, we provide the following implications for policy and practice that are rooted in our findings.

For Policy & Practice

- **Head Start-LEA Partners Started Their Work in Different Places:** Some of the cases in this study had longstanding relationships, while others were newer. Some had existing relationships primarily focused on special education or horizontal alignment with district preschool programs, but little focus on transitions. Some cases had MOUs that were used to inform practices, and in other cases most participants knew little about the contents of their MOUs. However, there is something to be learned from each of these cases: No one partnership has it all figured out, and that is likely to be true of many partnerships. Case study partners worked to build upon the strengths they each had.
- **Head Start-LEA Partners Invested in Activities Aimed at Building and Sustaining Relationships**: Across our cases and throughout the existing literature, it is clear that relationships mattered. Relationships also take time and effort to cultivate and maintain. We find that opportunities for more connections and communication help with relationship building. An important implication of this study is to ensure that Head Start staff and kindergarten staff—at the classroom up to the leadership levels—have ample opportunities to connect and communicate with one another in shared spaces. Examples mentioned by study participants included placing classrooms close to each other, creating opportunities for joint professional development, and making the time for staff to visit to each other's classrooms or buildings.
- **Shared Professional Supports and Joint Planning Opportunities across Head Start and K-12 are Still a Work in Progress**: We did not find any instances of shared professional supports across partners within our cases. Based on our prior review of the existing knowledge base (Ehrlich et al., 2021), this seems like a promising area for policymakers and educational administrators to explore. Increasing opportunities and incentives for shared trainings that focus on transitions might in turn help with the development of relationships across systems.
- **Many Approaches to Partnerships and Supporting Kindergarten Transitions Were Not Written into Policy**: Relationships are necessary to support successful transition approaches; however, they are subject to breaking down over time when people leave positions or change jobs. For example, some participants discussed the importance of formalizing approaches to kindergarten transition and

opportunities in policies such as MOUs and other policy documents as a way to make transition supports systematic.

For Research

- Future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of places where true vertical alignment is occurring between Head Start (or other ECE programs) and kindergarten grades. This would enable the field to gain a better awareness of how the 4Ps may be shared or aligned in those locales.
- It would be valuable to investigate whether there are locales with more prevalent cross-system/joint professional supports that bring together leaders or classroom staff that serve both preschool and kindergarten students. If so, do these experiences lead to smoother transitions and better outcomes for children, families, and educators?
- Future research could also explore whether and how policies with more articulated transition practices and strategies have better implementation of those practices and strategies as well as better outcomes for children and families.
- Furthermore, we did not find any locales in our study that had a combination of aligned policies, professional supports, or perspectives around kindergarten transition across Head Start and K-12 systems. Although our theory of change posits that these three factors are necessary to facilitate coordinated transition practices, the evidence did not permit us to test this critical centerpiece of the HS2K theory of change. Future research on a larger sample of sites may permit a more thorough examination of these relationships.
- Given that intermediaries and community partners played important (but different) roles in most of our cases, more research is needed to understand these roles and how they facilitate cross-system relationships and/or play other roles in community transition processes. The role of community partners has been largely absent from previous literature on transitions, and future research could dig deeper into the distinct roles they play across different communities.

Glossary

Alignment: The extent to which systems offer similar or complementary opportunities, or opportunities that build upon one another in ways that reflect a logical progression. Strategies and actions implemented at the organization level to create alignment are intended to strengthen the coordination and continuity between Head Start and K-12 and create meaningful similarities across the systems. Examples of strategies in which alignment can be seen include professional learning opportunities, data systems, learning standards, assessment approaches, instructional approaches, transition activities, family engagement strategies, and more (Kauerz, 2018).

- Horizontal alignment: Alignment within a single age/grade level, such as between different pre-k programs or different classrooms within the same grade. In this study, this represents alignment efforts between Head Start and other preschool programs.
- Vertical alignment: Alignment across different progressive age/grade levels such as between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. In this study, this also represents alignment between the Head Start and K-12 systems.

Blended Classrooms: Preschool classrooms that serve children eligible for different ECE funding streams.

Case: The combination of the Head Start program (and the center they identified) and the LEA that the program identified as working most closely with around transitions. A case also included the partner elementary school Head Start and LEAs identified who participated in this study.

Co-location: When Head Start children are taught and cared for in centers or classrooms physically located within an elementary school building or campus that also houses kindergarten students. Co-located Head Start children may attend blended classrooms with other pre-k children (e.g., those whose program is state- or district-funded) or attend classrooms exclusively for Head Start.

Head Start Agency: A local public or private non-profit or for-profit entity designated by ACF to operate a Head Start program to serve children age three to compulsory school age (per section 641(b) and (d) of the Head Start Act).[1] The Office of Head Start categorizes Head Start programs as one of seven agency types: Community Action Agency (CAA); school system; charter school, private/public non-profit (non-CAA) (e.g., church or non-profit hospital); private/public for-profit (e.g., for-profit hospitals);

[1] https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1305-2-terms, accessed June 21, 2023.

government agency (non-CAA); or tribal government or consortium (American Indian/Alaska Native).[2]

Head Start Center: A Head Start program facility. A Head Start program may have one or more centers. In this report, when a Head Start program is located within a school building, we consider that to be different than a stand-alone Head Start center.

Head Start-Local Education Agency Configurations: The constitutions of Head Start programs/centers and Local Education Agencies (LEAs)/school districts that share feeder patterns of children between Head Start and kindergarten.

- One-to-Many: There is only one Head Start program in an area. Children from one Head Start program enroll in kindergarten in multiple schools within multiple LEAs (which can be of the same or different school(s) from where Head Start classroom(s) are co-located).
- Many-to-One: Head Start children from multiple Head Start programs may disperse into multiple elementary schools within one LEA. The LEA also receives children from multiple Head Start programs.
- Many-to-Many: Children from multiple Head Start programs enroll in kindergarten in multiple LEAs; LEA receives children from multiple Head Start programs.

Head Start Program: An agency, or their delegate, that is a local public or private non-profit or for-profit entity designated by the Administration for Children & Families to operate a Head Start program to serve children age three to five, pursuant to section 641(b) and (d) of the Head Start Act.

Intermediary Organization: An organization that serves to coordinate communication, collaboration, and/or alignment between two other entities (in this case, between Head Start programs and school districts). They may lead the planning, coordination, and management of cross-system tasks.

K-12 System: Public school systems that encompass kindergarten through grade 12.

Kindergarten Transitions: The process of moving into kindergarten from a prior set of experiences. In this report, we specifically focus on the transition from Head Start into kindergarten. We consider the transition to kindergarten to be an ongoing process rather than an event that happens as a single point in time.

Local Education Agency (LEA): A public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or for a

[2] 2021-2022 Head Start Program Information Report (hhs.gov, accessed June 21, 2023.

combination of school districts or counties as are recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools. In most cases, but not all, an LEA is the same as a school district.[3]

The 4Ps: Four main factors both within and across organizational systems (Head Start and K-12) posited by the HS2K Project to influence children's transition experiences. The first three Ps — (1) Perspectives, (2) Policies, and (3) Professional supports— intersect to influence the quantity, quality, and coordination of the fourth P, (4) Practices.

- **Perspectives** are different stakeholders' (child/family, educator, administrators/schools/centers) vision, values, and beliefs about transitions to kindergarten, including their and others' roles in supporting transitions to kindergarten.
- **Policies** are explicit (written/formal) documentation of organizational regulations; standards; agreements/memoranda of understanding (MOUs); procedures; and guidance around supporting transitions to kindergarten.
- **Practices** are concrete activities designed to support children/families during the transition to kindergarten. Transition practices can be enacted by Head Start or kindergarten separately or jointly through coordinated transition practices. They can also occur at various levels within/across each system (e.g., Head Start Grantee/LEA leadership, Head Start directors/principals, teachers, and staff).
- **Professional Supports** are professional development/learning opportunities and other resources that support teachers, site administrators, grantee/LEA administrators, and policymakers to enact strong transition approaches (e.g., professional development, coaching, dedicated planning time).

Transition Practices/Approaches: Systems-level approaches—such as those that help create more alignment in instructional approaches and expectations—and individual-level practices—such as providing information to families or data to children's future teacher—that are designed to create a smoother transition experience for children and families.

[3] https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-303/subpart-A/subject-group-ECFR8d7eb7e02db8abe/section-303.23

Chapter 1: Background and Study Overview

Introduction

The Understanding Children's Transitions from Head Start to Kindergarten (HS2K) Project (contract HHSP233201500048I, task orders 75P00119F37016 and 75N98022F00247) was a multi-year project funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. The purpose of this project was to better understand how to improve children's transitions from Head Start programs to elementary schools.

When children transition from Head Start to kindergarten, they may face different environments and expectations. Children and families also confront different expectations for how they should behave, who to interact with, and how their time is spent. These kindergarten transitions occur within a broader context of disparate systems and policies, with differing and sometimes contradictory governance structures, philosophies, and accountability metrics (e.g., Kagan & Tarrant, 2010; Pianta et al., 2007). Even positive transitions can cause disequilibrium and challenges, particularly for young children who benefit from routines. Thus, children and families face challenges when transitioning from Head Start (and from other ECE settings) into elementary schools (Cowan et al., 2005; Purtell et al., 2019; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). A **successful kindergarten transition**, therefore, would be one where that 'jolt' is minimized—where families and children understand and are ready for the expectations they will face when entering kindergarten, where teachers in both systems work together to ensure a warm "hand off," and where systems are structured in ways that provide more continuity in experiences for those children and families.

Research has shown that children's early development can set the stage for ongoing learning. For example, there is strong research about the impact of Head Start, a federally funded ECE program designed to promote the school readiness of preschool-aged children from families with low income. The Head Start Impact Study (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2005) was a randomized controlled trial that found that children who attended Head Start were better prepared for kindergarten than similar children who were not enrolled in Head Start. The purpose of the HS2K Project is to learn more about how to promote this ongoing learning and build upon these early successes by strengthening children and families' experiences throughout the kindergarten transition.

Central to the project is a systems approach that recognizes that effective transitions require intentional engagement from *both* the sending programs (Head Start) and the receiving programs (elementary schools). This approach also recognizes that kindergarten transition strategies that support children and families must be implemented at multiple levels—among classroom teachers in Head Start and kindergarten, families, elementary school principals and Head Start directors, Head Start grantees and school districts, and state and federal agencies. Specifically, the HS2K Project aims to explore the definition of what practitioners consider to be "successful transitions" from a multi-level and systemic perspective.

The HS2K Project addressed its goals through several reports, including a review of existing literature and the development of a theory of change (Ehrlich et al., 2021), analyses of secondary data on: memoranda of understanding (MOU) between Head Start programs and local education agencies (LEAs; Cook et al., 2022), nationally representative data on combinations of transition practices (Ehrlich Loewe, Cook et al., 2022), and transition practices implemented in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs (Lin et al., 2022). In addition, the project developed design options for potential future descriptive studies (Ehrlich Loewe, Kabourek et al., 2022).

This report details comparative findings from five case studies of the system-level supports for children and families as they transition to kindergarten. The case studies were conducted in five locales across the United States, building upon the previous work of the HS2K Project and setting the stage for future work on the transitions from Head Start to kindergarten.

Defining Transitions across Systems

The transition to kindergarten sets the foundation for success in elementary school and beyond. It is an important milestone not only for children but also for families and educators. The transition to kindergarten occurs within and between two distinct systems (ECE and K-12 education) that each work under their own governance structures, philosophies, and accountability metrics.

In the HS2K Project, as in much of the literature, we consider the transition to kindergarten to be an ongoing process rather than an event that happens at a single moment in time (e.g., Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Eckert, 2008; Petriwskyj et

DEFINING THE TRANSITION

Our project defines the kindergarten transition period as spanning from the beginning of the school year prior to kindergarten, through entry into kindergarten, until the end of the kindergarten year. Under such a definition, **the transition to kindergarten is a process that lasts approximately two years.**

al., 2005; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Rosenkoetter et al., 2009; Stormont et al., 2005). This includes both the preparation for—and later adjustment to—the new experiences of kindergarten. There is (1) preparation for the transition, (2) the moment when entry into a new space begins, and (3) a period of processing and adapting to that new space. Thus, our project defines the kindergarten transition period as spanning from the beginning of the school year prior to kindergarten, through entry into kindergarten, until the end of the kindergarten year. Under such a definition, the transition to kindergarten is a process that lasts approximately two years.

What Do We Mean by "Systems"?

Within the context of this project, we are focusing on one *type* of ECE program—Head Start. Head Start is embedded within a broader "ECE system" that includes many other types of programs, including state-funded pre-k; child care; home-based care; family, friend, and neighbor care; and privately-funded centers. However, because we are studying Head Start, we are thinking about *the Head Start system* as the "sending side."

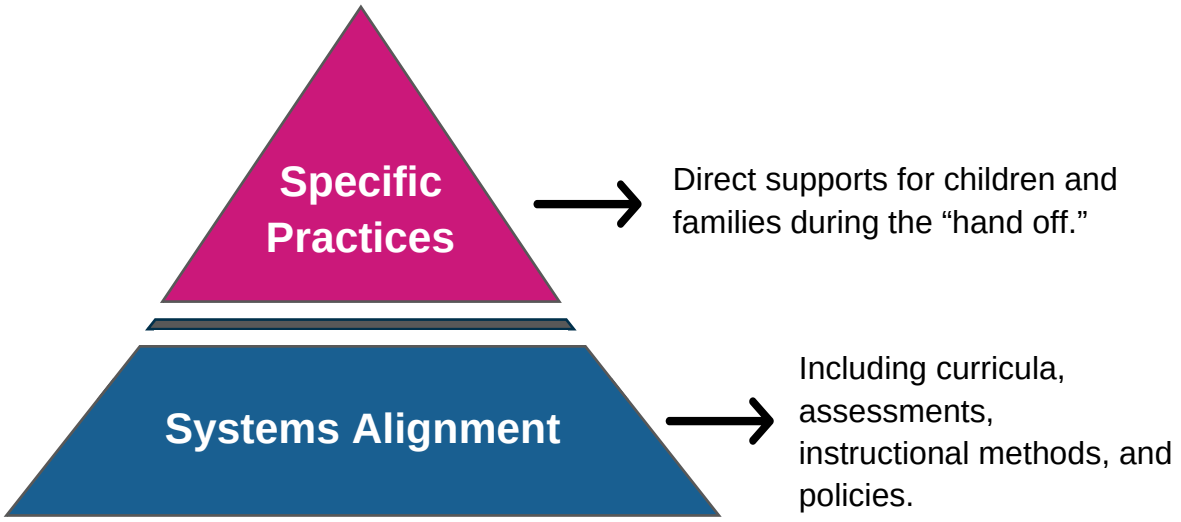
Kindergarten is embedded within what we call the "K-12 system." In this project, these are public school systems that encompass kindergarten through grade 12. This is what we consider to be the "receiving side" of the kindergarten transition.

With recent movements to embed pre-kindergarten classrooms within schools, the distinction between ECE systems and K-12 systems has become much less clear. In some locales, pre-k is funded and overseen by the same leaders as other elementary school grades, suggesting they are part of the K–12 system (or sometimes referred to as the "Pre-K–12" system"). In other locales, even if located within school buildings, ECE programs are run by different leaders and driven by different standards than kindergarten. However, for the purposes of understanding this comparative case study, we consider the K-12 system to be a distinct system from the Head Start system. As described in more detail below, many participants talked about partnerships and collaborations occurring between *Head Start* and *other pre-k programs*. For this project, we do not consider those to be the type of "cross-system" collaboration and coordination depicted in the HS2K theory of change. And when we refer to the "LEA," we are referring to the K-12 system perspective.

During this period of time, several things need attention to truly understand the best way to support children and families through this process:

1. Head Start (or other ECE providers) need to prepare children for what is expected of them when they enter kindergarten. On the other side of the transition, elementary schools and kindergarten teachers need to be able to meet children where they are and be ready to build upon their prior development (without repetition). The smoothest way this would happen is if systems, expectations, instructional practices, and curriculum and assessments are aligned with each other so that families and children experience continuity as they transition from Head Start to kindergarten.
2. Teachers in both systems need to focus specifically on the "hand off" of children and families. This may include data sharing, collaborative planning, and joint meetings with families.

Figure 1. Components of the Kindergarten Transition



Throughout our case studies, we ask about information that addresses both of these aspects of supporting transitions (**Figure 1**). Transition "practices" or "approaches" are therefore any that would address *either* of these goals listed above. We recognize that all aspects of supporting transitions exist within a much broader context, which we articulate through the HS2K Transition Landscape. **Figure 2** depicts this theoretical landscape as a visual representation of the variety of people and contexts that influence children's and families' transitions to kindergarten. The landscape illustrates the fact that transitions are not all similar or straightforward. It shows the complexity of feeder patterns, or the different paths that children can take as they transition from Head Start classrooms to kindergarten classrooms. It also shows the various organizations that exist within systems on both sides of that transition. In particular, the landscape highlights three key takeaways about the transition from Head Start to kindergarten:

1. **Transitions are two-sided and involve a sending side and a receiving side**. Teachers and leaders within both systems (the Head Start system and K-12 system) are beholden to very different requirements and standards. Because of these differences, there is a fundamental need for *both* sides to be mutually engaged in the transition process. Without this joint effort, alignment and continuity for children and families is extremely difficult to achieve. There is complexity in having the two sides work together, while also centering the experiences of children and families, but it is a crucial piece of the puzzle if practitioners are to better support children and families through the kindergarten transition.

2. **There are many child feeder patterns, complicating coordination and collaboration around transitions**. A Head Start classroom may send all of its kindergarten age-eligible children to the same elementary school. That same elementary school, however, may receive children from many different or just a few ECE settings. Alternatively, one Head Start classroom could send its kindergarten age-eligible children to different elementary schools in multiple districts or schools within a district. Factors such as geography, family choice, family mobility, and neighborhood school assignments all contribute to where and why children transition from some Head Start classrooms into particular kindergarten classrooms. Community characteristics also play a role in the relationships between Head Start programs and the receiving elementary schools. For example, small, rural communities may have less dispersion than large, urban ones. All these factors contribute to different feeder patterns, which in turn have different implications for the collaboration and coordination required to support transitions, including potential challenges with building and sustaining relationships across Head Start and LEAs

3. **Each side of the transition has its own set of governance structures that influence kindergarten transition practice and policy**. Consequently, there are many opportunities for (mis)alignment within and across the sides that can affect the transition experience for children and families. The visual depiction of this demonstrates that while classroom teachers are essential to effective transitions, they are not the only ones who play an important role. Site administrators (e.g., Head Start directors and elementary school principals), organization leaders (e.g., Head Start grantee executives and school district leaders), state agency personnel, and federal policymakers all can influence alignment strategies across the two sides of the kindergarten transition.

Figure 2. Head Start to Kindergarten (HS2K) Transition Landscape

Head Start to Kindergarten (HS2K) Transition Landscape

Supporting children's transition to kindergarten is a complex, multi-system, multi-level process

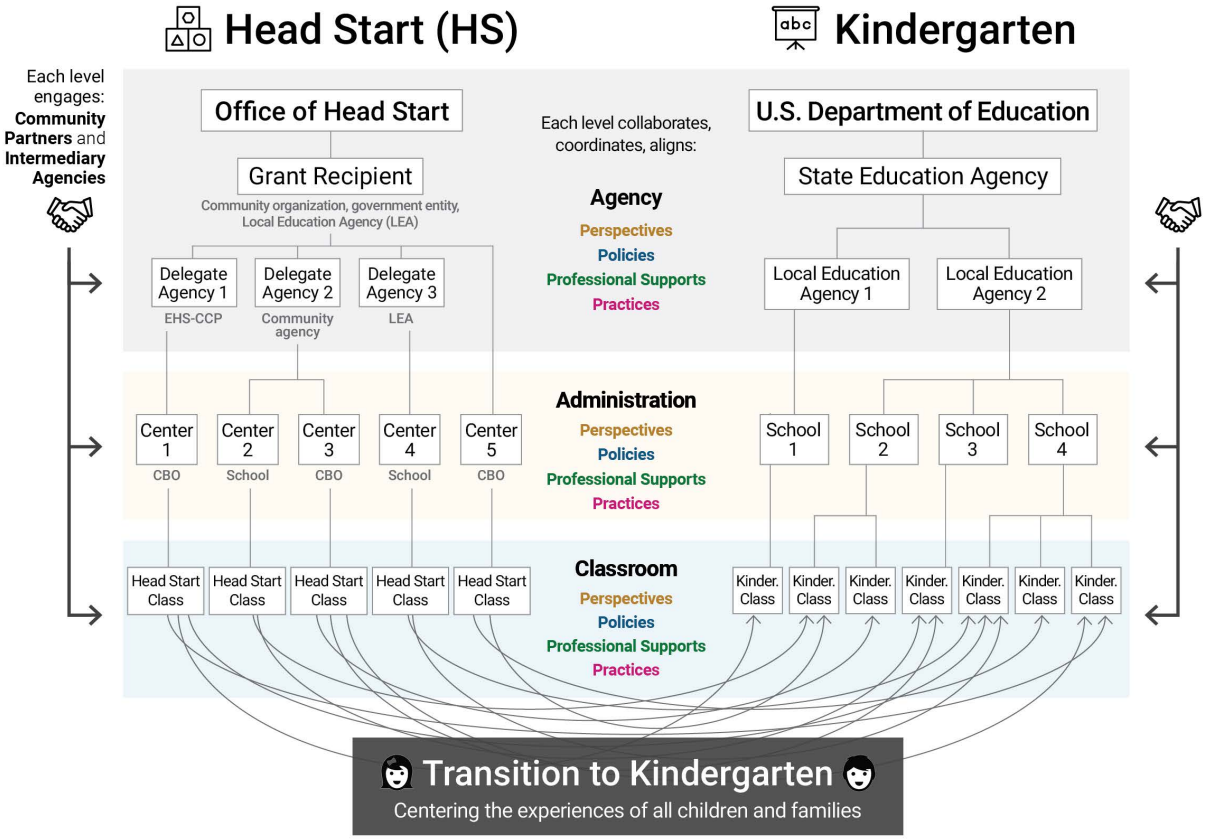
***Transitions involve two sides**: Each side has own goals and perspectives, policies, professional supports for teachers and other professionals, and effective practices, that influence the work across different levels (e.g., classroom, school, district, state).*

Children and their families are at the center

Head Start is the side that sends children

Kindergarten is the side that receives children

Community Partners and **Intermediary Agencies** engage at each level



1. *Starting at either left or right depicts the **organizational levels of systems** in each sector that influence one another and influence transitions to kindergarten.*

 For example, on the K-12 side, kindergarten teachers' efforts are situated within elementary schools which in turn are situated within the context of LEAs – and all of these levels have agency to influence transitions.

***Grant Recipient:** An agency which has been designated to operate a Head Start program by the United States Department of Health & Human Services.*
***Delegate Agency:** An agency to which a grant recipient has delegated all or part of the responsibility of the grant recipient for operating a Head Start program.*

2. *Moving toward the bottom, the arrows arching between children in HS and kindergarten classrooms represent **complex feeder patterns**, with children who attend the same HS class transitioning to multiple kindergarten classes, elementary schools, and/or LEAs. Systems decisions and structures directly influence the experience of children and families.*

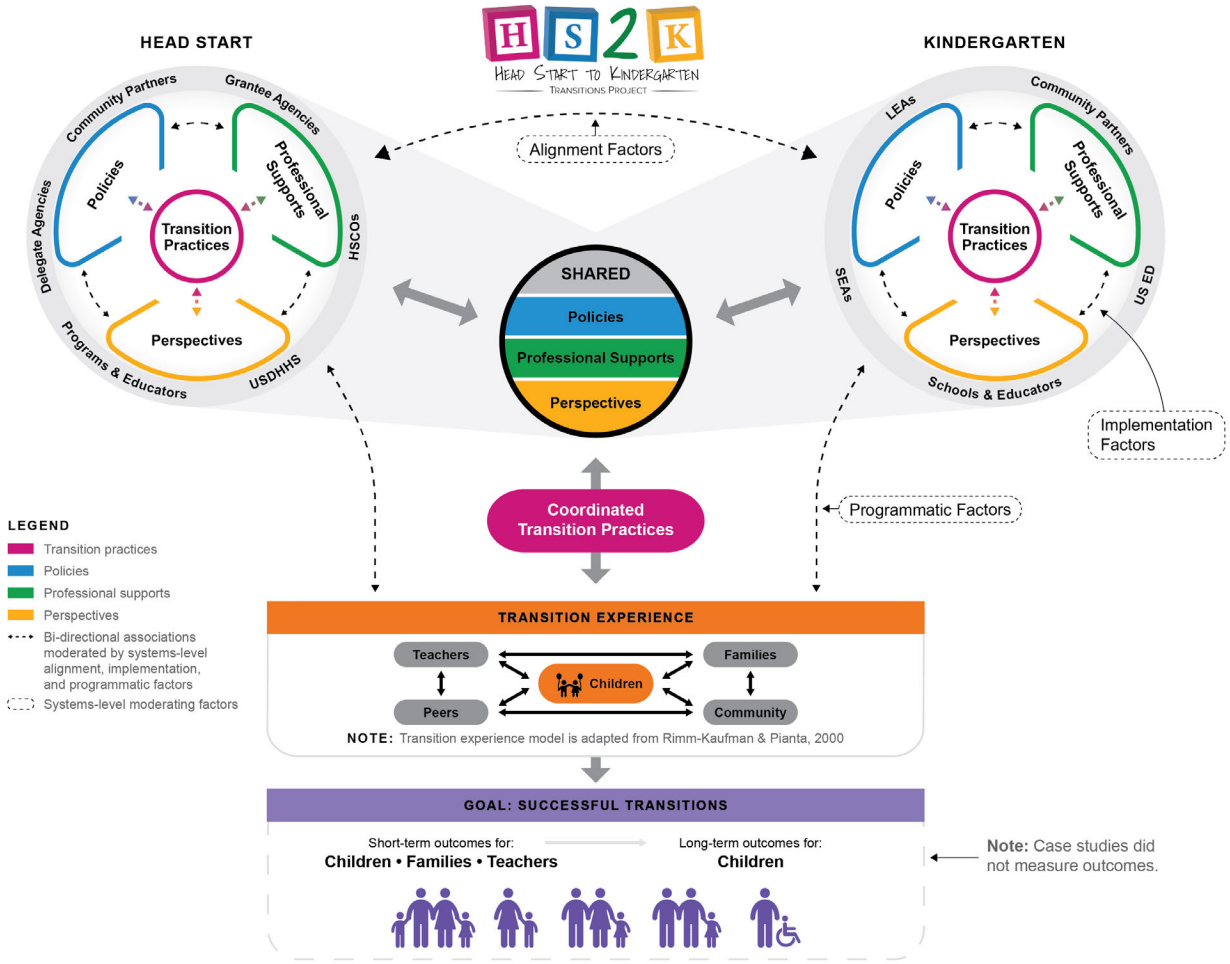
 At times, a local HS program may establish shared transition practices with one elementary school or LEA, but if HS children disperse into multiple elementary schools/LEAs, then it might be more difficult for cross-system collaboration to support all children. The extent of this dispersion may vary based on community (e.g., some small, rural communities may have less dispersion than a large, urban community).

Prior Research and Gaps in the Literature on Transitions

To date, much of what is known about supporting children's transition to kindergarten narrowly attends to the classroom-level practices implemented by ECE programs or to kindergarten teachers separately. There has been limited attention on the multi-layered perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices within and across the ECE and K-12 systems that are also needed to adequately support these transitions.

Through a review of the literature, the HS2K Project found existing studies about specific, concrete transition practices that teachers, programs, and/or school staff implement (see Ehrlich et al., 2021 for review)—or the top portion of **Figure 1** above. However, little evidence exists on the policies and professional supports needed to align perspectives and support teachers in implementing specific practices directly with children, families, or other teachers—see the bottom portion of **Figure 1** above. There is also limited understanding of the mechanisms through which those strategies would support key short- and long-term outcomes for teachers, families, and children. Despite these emerging themes from key informants and a small body of existing literature, gaps remain about what policies are in place within Head Start and K-12 systems to drive efforts to support transitions and/or promote cross-system alignment. Additionally, there is very little known about how existing policies are implemented and what facilitates and hinders that implementation.

Figure 3. HS2K Theory of Change



What does exist in the research and knowledge base has led to the development of the HS2K theory of change (see **Figure 3**), which provides a framework for understanding systems-level approaches that can lead to successful transitions from Head Start to kindergarten. The theory of change illustrates the two-sided nature of transitions in which there is a sending side (Head Start) and a receiving side (kindergarten). Both within and across the organizational systems, we posit that four main factors (the 4Ps; see **Figure 4**) influence children's transition experiences. The first three Ps — (1) Perspectives, (2) Policies, and (3) Professional supports—intersect to influence the quantity, quality, and coordination of the fourth P, (4) Practices. The Head Start and kindergarten systems, as well as child development processes, are all influenced by external sociocultural, historical, and other contextual factors. Overall, we found that more research is needed around perspectives, policies, professional supports and how they support coordinated practices.

Figure 4. The HS2K 4Ps



Significance of Study

The HS2K Comparative Cross Case Study was designed to help address gaps in the literature and further explore and refine the HS2K theory of change. This study is one of the first to focus on the policies, professional supports, and practices from multiple perspectives across the two systems that influence transitions. The study focuses on five Head Start-LEA partnerships, which included families, Head Start teachers and leaders, kindergarten teachers, elementary school leaders, local education agency leaders, and community partners.

Case Study Design

Case studies are examinations of bounded systems in which researchers focus on processes in context rather than on outcomes of specific events (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam, 1998). The goal of case study inquiry is to capture what is happening on the ground—involving qualitative fieldwork (Merriam, 1998)—as a method to understand complex social phenomenon (Yin, 1994; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This comparative multi-case study takes a systems-level, ecological approach to studying promising transition approaches from Head Start to kindergarten. Our goal is to provide holistic and rich descriptions of the strategies, relationships, and practices supporting kindergarten transitions across selected partnerships between Head Start and K-12 entities. In doing so, we aim to better understand the complex ecology influencing the experiences of children and their families. The comparative multi-case study design allowed us to see how approaches may differ by context as well as by child and family characteristics. For this study, we refer to a Head Start and LEA partnership as a

bounded system “case” and the individual Head Start grantees, delegates, or centers, and LEAs or elementary schools within these cases as “sites.”

While case studies can produce abundant detail and nuance, they are limited in their ability to produce generalizable knowledge. Case studies cannot illuminate causal associations between specific factors and outcomes. Thus, our case-specific descriptions should be read as in-depth illustrations of the inner workings of kindergarten transition processes as they existed and were implemented *in context* at the time of data collection. These case studies complement the vast array of related activities of the HS2K Project (including a review of the knowledge base) that, in part, documented what we know about the efficacy of many of the transition practices and strategies implemented across our cases. Taken together with our other project activities and broader transitions knowledge, our case studies can inform experimentation amongst partnerships across ECE and K-12, as well as spark new research on how systems can best support teachers, children and their families.

Scope of the Study

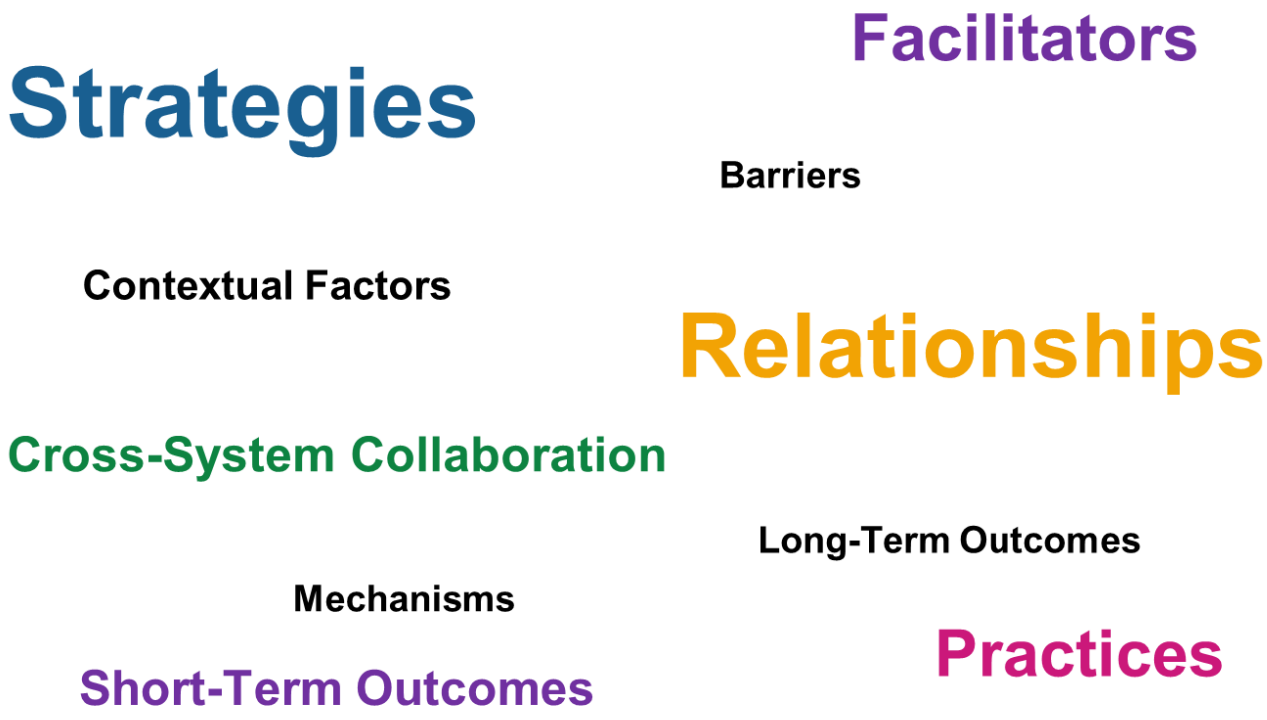
The primary goals of this comparative multi-case study were to understand:

- The multi-layered perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices (i.e., the 4Ps) around kindergarten transitions that exist within Head Start, within elementary schools, and across systems.
- The organizational contexts that influence transitions.
- The direct experiences of families and their children as they move between systems.

We explored the multiple settings and multi-directional influences on children’s, families’, and teachers’ transition-related experiences and outcomes through three primary research questions:

1. What **strategies and practices** are Head Start programs and elementary schools implementing to support children as they transition from Head Start to kindergarten? What is the content, quality, and quantity of these strategies and practices? How are they experienced/perceived by children, families, teachers, and other direct service providers?
2. What characterizes **relationships/partnerships** among Head Start programs, elementary schools, and other community partners that support children’s successful transitions from Head Start to kindergarten? What are the specific facilitators of, and barriers to, successful transitions?
3. What are the key *perceived* **short- and long-term outcomes** of transition strategies and practices for children, families, Head Start teachers, and kindergarten teachers? What are the key contextual factors and mechanisms that result in these *perceived* key outcomes?

The case studies addressed these HS2K Project research questions by examining several "moderators," including transition practices and approaches as experienced by children, families, and staff (**RQ1**). Throughout this study, we also discerned how transition approaches varied based on different configurations among Head Start grantees/delegates, Head Start centers, elementary schools, and LEAs, as well as other contextual factors that facilitated or impeded meaningful collaboration (**RQ2, RQ3**).[4] Lastly, we explored staff and families' perceptions of short- and longer-term outcomes of transition-related efforts (**RQ3**).



Case Sample Selection

Site Nomination and Selection Process

In the fall of 2020, the research team released a solicitation for nominations of known Head Start-LEA partnerships that implement innovative or promising transition strategies and practices. The call for nominations was posted to the OPRE website and sent to federal and non-federal listservs, as well as forwarded (via targeted recruitment) to programs most likely to have innovative practices through participation in collaboration-focused initiatives. We received 11 nominations from across the United States.

[4] For example, the degree to which Head Start have agreements with local education agencies (see Maxwell, Warner-Richter, Partika, Franchett, & Kane, 2019) or are integrated with school-based pre-k programs.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and continued severe disruptions to both the ECE and K-12 landscapes during the 2020-2021 school year, the research team delayed final recruitment and data collection by one year to improve the odds of successful recruitment. We repeated the solicitation and recruitment process again in the fall of 2021, ultimately receiving an additional six nominations for a total of 17.

The research team reviewed nominations in collaboration with OPRE with the intent to select a purposive sample of six Head Start-LEA partnerships. To identify top candidates, we considered the following selection criteria:

- ***Pre-existing relationship between the Head Start and LEA.*** As we were interested in dyadic and collaborative relationships between Head Start and LEAs that support the transition process, we requested nominations and selected sites that indicated they had a pre-existing relationship and history of working together. Our solicitation gave nominators space to describe the partnership and what they believed to be the partnership's key strategies and practices. Evidence of a pre-existing relationship was our key criterion in selecting cases.
- ***Indication of innovative and/or promising approaches/practices.*** Selected cases illuminated different transition approaches that we thought might support positive experiences for teachers, families, and children. Our literature review and theory of change suggested that approaches with strong cross-system collaboration might be most beneficial for children and families (Ehrlich et al., 2021). Features included family engagement approaches or strategies and cross-system communication, collaboration, and coordination among teachers.
- ***Urbanicity.*** We selected cases that varied in urbanicity so we could examine and understand potential differences in approaches and strategies and transition challenges.
- ***Inter-organizational configurations.*** The selected sites varied by program characteristics, including agency type (i.e., Community Action Agency, public/private for- or non-profit, school system). The selected sites varied by number of centers and enrollment size and key demographic characteristics of the children and families served.
- ***Geographic locale.*** The selected cases are in varied geographic areas and Office of Head Start regions.

We selected eight partnerships across the 17 nominations, initially reaching out to six and holding two as alternates. Although we did not prioritize the size of the Head Start or size of the LEA, we did select on configuration and urbanicity, which ensured that our final sample included Head Start programs and LEAs of varying sizes.

Recruitment Process

Site Level Recruitment

Case study leads initiated recruitment amongst Head Start programs in February 2022. After confirming interest and capacity with Head Start administrators, case study leads then connected with their LEA partners. All recruitment activity was completed by May 2022. More details about the recruitment process can be found in **Appendix A**.

Non-participation

After sending initial recruitment emails, one site of the initial six did not respond and therefore did not participate in the study. Initial discussions with administrators of another of the initial six Head Start sites revealed recent leadership changes at their partner LEA. We subsequently had difficulty gaining agreement from that LEA; thus, the research team made the decision not to move forward with that case. Lastly, we had another of the initial six sites decline to participate in the study. In response, the team reached out to the two alternate sites—in addition to selecting an additional alternate site—and were able to recruit two of them to participate. The third alternate site declined to participate due to timing and staff constraints. Ultimately, we successfully recruited five total cases.

Practitioner Level Recruitment Within Sites

Once we confirmed site participation across administrators from both systems, we sourced staff contact information for interview invitations. Our goal was to interview participants from each case that were involved in supporting Head Start to kindergarten transition efforts. In particular, we aimed to interview (per case):

- Up to two Head Start grantee or delegate agency administrators
- Up to two Head Start managers or coordinators
- One community partner or other service provider
- One Head Start center director or principal
- Up to two Head Start classroom teachers
- Up to ten Head Start parents/caregivers (via one focus groups)
- Up to three LEA district administrators/staff
- One principal
- Up to two kindergarten teachers
- One other elementary school staff member

However, we allowed for some flexibility, knowing that each case was unique in terms of the number of staff, as well as their roles and responsibilities for supporting transitions. In addition, we were unable to recruit all of the staff and parents we wanted in each

case (see the **Limitations** section for more information). Therefore, the number of interviews by role varied for each of the cases, as presented in more detail in **Table 3**.

Parent Recruitment for Focus Groups

We created parent invitation emails and a flyer and worked directly with site administrators to recruit Head Start parents for focus groups. Case study research leads, along with Head Start site administrators, worked together to determine the best way to recruit parents. For example, in Case 1, we worked with the site contacts to set up dates and times for the focus groups. Site contacts then sent the email and flyer to all parents with children in Case 1 elementary school and created an online sign-up sheet. The flyer and email contained the log-in information for the meeting. Study team members sent reminders to parents who signed up to participate.

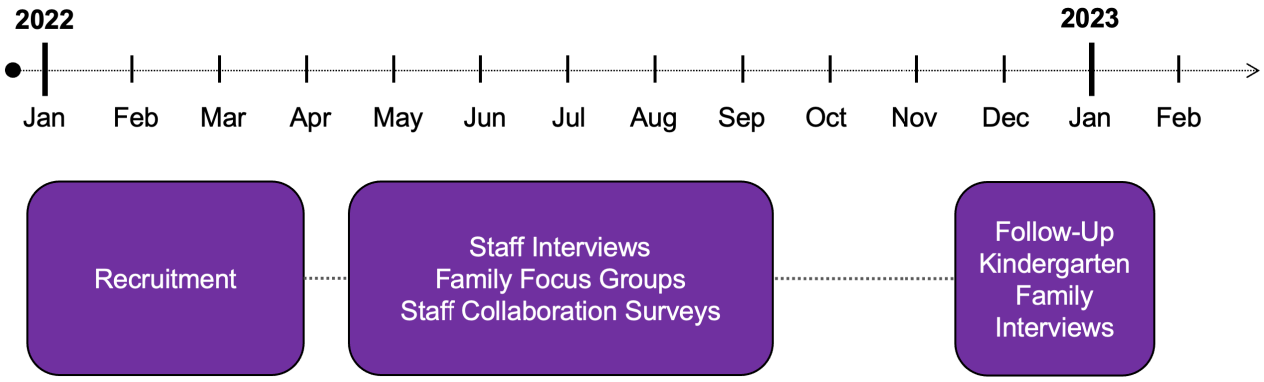
Data Collection Methodology

Design

We conducted interviews with Head Start and LEA staff at multiple levels of the systems (LEA, school, program, center, classroom) and focus groups with Head Start parents at our five cases between April and September 2022. Beginning in December 2022 and continuing into January 2023, we conducted follow-up interviews with a subset of those focus group parents following their child's transition to kindergarten.

While not strictly structured, the research team used a more structured interview approach for both interviews and focus groups to reduce variability since there were multiple researchers conducting interviews and focus groups in multiple sites (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Although protocols were structured, all of the interview questions were open-ended, and participants were encouraged to elaborate and give examples. In addition, researchers were also encouraged to ask probing questions—when necessary and if time allowed—to elicit more information about the outlined topics or themes.

Figure 5. Data Collection Timeline



Data Sources

- *Structured Staff Interviews* (*N*=59) lasted between 45 and 90 minutes—depending on role—and were conducted between April and September 2022, via Zoom. Topics included background (e.g., role and responsibilities), perspectives on the transition and transition supports, family engagement in the transition processes, transition policies, partnerships between Head Start programs and district/elementary schools, and final reflections. We also asked participants to describe the composition and structure of the people and community partners they work with directly around transitions, both within and across systems. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

- *Staff Collaboration Surveys* (*N*=47) were sent to participants after their interviews and took 10-15 minutes to complete. These were intended to provide a better understanding of the professional relationship structure within each case: types of staff within and across systems who collaborate with each other to support the transition process. We asked for the roles of people or organizations who support the transition and the frequency of contact with these individuals. This Qualtrics survey was sent immediately following each interview with Head Start grantee and LEA administrators, Head Start program and elementary school leaders, Head Start and kindergarten teachers and staff, Head Start managers/coordinators, and community partners.

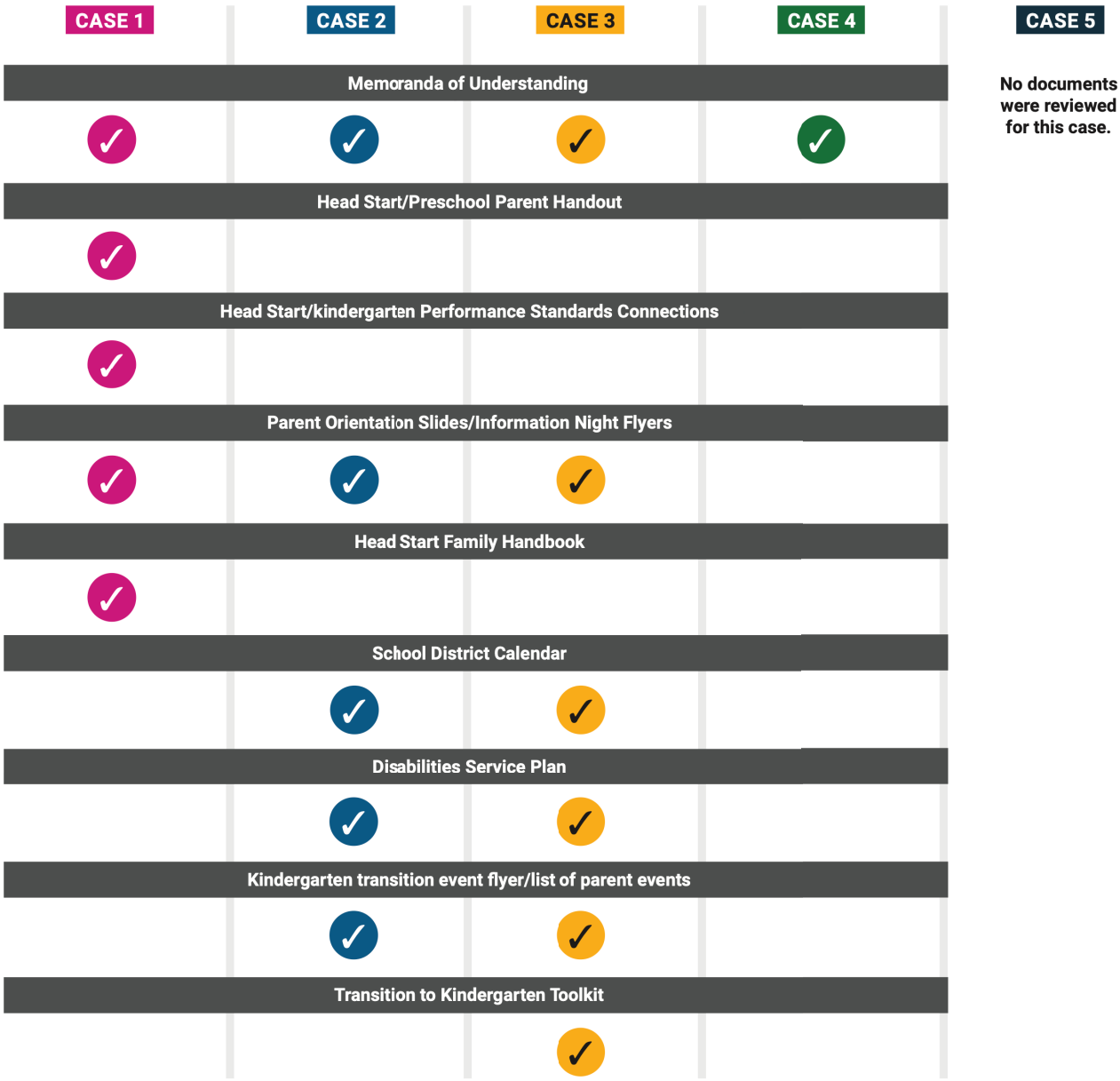
- *Documents* (*N*=14) were requested from each case to aid our understanding of their policies and practices, organizational relationships, and the nature of information shared with families. Each site shared a different set of documents that they felt best informed their approach to the transition process. Given the range of policies and procedures across sites, we did not intend to collect uniform documents for each case. To request documents, sites were prompted with the following text:

"We will send a portal for uploading any relevant documents around transitions." Examples of potentially relevant documents include:

- Organizational charts
- Staff rosters
- MOUs between Head Start and Local Education Agencies
- HS2K transition information for families (shared via websites or program handouts)

As shown in **Table 1**, the most common documents reviewed included MOUs between Head Start and LEAs (that memorialize policies and procedures related to kindergarten transition and inter-organizational collaboration), and information for families shared via websites or program handouts.

Table 1. Types of Documents Provided by and Reviewed for Each Case



- *Focus Groups* (*N*=6; in Case 3, we held two focus groups because of a larger number of interested parents) were held via Zoom at each Head Start site to obtain in-depth understanding of families' experiences with the transition. Specifically, we sought a better understanding of the successes, changes, and challenges with the transition process. These focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes. However, for two of the focus groups, only one parent joined the group, which made those sessions one-on-one interviews. Focus groups were conducted in English except for a single Spanish-language interview conducted to match the parent's native language and preferences. (For more information about the number of participants by role for each case, see **Table 3**).

- *Family Background Questionnaires* (*N*=15 out of 23 completed) were sent to all parents who participated in a focus group via a Qualtrics link. These questionnaires gathered information related to primary caregiver background and demographics, special family circumstances that may require additional supports, exposure to transition supports and activities, and willingness to participate in a follow-up interview in the fall of 2022. We asked participants to complete this complementary background questionnaire as a part of their participation in a focus group. The family background questionnaire was available in English and Spanish.

- *Follow-Up Semi-Structured Post-Transition Family Interviews* (*N*=5) were conducted amongst those parents who indicated their interest in a follow-up interview on the family background questionnaire. The research team contacted parents who participated in focus groups in December 2022, and conducted 45-minute interviews via Zoom between December 2022 and January 2023. These interviews were intended to better understand how parents and children experienced the transition from Head Start to kindergarten as well as their perceptions of the helpfulness of the transition supports and activities that were described by the Head Start and LEA staff. Participants included four parents from the Head Start site in Case 3 and one parent from the Head Start site in Case 1.

Interview and Focus Group Protocol Design

The research team created a matrix of constructs and protocol items, mapping each protocol item onto the study research questions. This format ensured that each construct was represented in the appropriate participant protocols. Our protocols covered a variety of high-level constructs and topic areas, represented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Interview and Focus Group Protocol Constructs and Topic Areas

Construct	Topics
Kindergarten transition strategies and practices	• Operational definition of "successful transition to kindergarten" • Timeline for HS2K transition • Strategies and practices implemented • Alignment and continuity of practices (i.e., assessments and curriculum) between Head Start and kindergarten • Professional supports provided to staff • Perceptions of how well practices are implemented • Perceived benefits of strategies and practices implemented • Challenges to implementing HS2K strategies and practices • Strategies for engaging family on HS2K • Perceptions of family participation in K practices • Differentiated HS2K practices/approaches for special populations • COVID implications and opportunities • Information/data collection and sharing between Head Start and kindergarten
Relationships to support kindergarten transitions	• Coordination between Head Start grantee and LEA • Coordination between Head Start program/center and school • Partnerships with community organizations • How collaborations influence transition supports • How relationships support alignment across Head Start and kindergarten • Characteristics of Head Start and LEA relationship(s) • Family relationship with center/school staff • Facilitators to collaborations across systems • Challenges to collaborations across systems
Contextual factors that may influence transition practices and experiences	• Participant background and experience • Diversity of workforce and children/families • Beliefs about the role and responsibilities of parents, staff, community partners • Family perceptions: learning environments in Head Start and kindergarten; child and family kindergarten readiness for the transition process and kindergarten expectations • Feeder/enrollment patterns between Head Start and elementary school • Transition policy enactment and implementation • Primary aim of transition policies
Perceived outcomes	• Child: successful transition supports • Family: successful transition supports • Teacher: strong relationships, collaboration, and supports focused on kindergarten transitions • Systems level: successful transitions (e.g., alignment)

Staff Collaboration Survey Development

For the staff collaboration survey, we developed items that would allow us to understand who was working with whom to support transitions. Therefore, we asked each participant what their job title was and to name up to five individuals they collaborated with around supporting kindergarten transitions within their organization and five individuals they collaborated with from outside their organization. The participants were also asked to record the job title of each of these collaborators, the frequency with which they collaborated, and how instrumental the individual was in helping ensure successful transitions. We created Likert type scales to measure these constructs.

Participants

We collected information from a similar set of participants at Head Start and LEA sites to foster comparability across cases. See **Table 3** for information regarding the case study participants. Because participants and case study sites were purposively selected, they are not representative of the population of Head Start agencies, Head Start programs, LEAs, elementary schools, or community service partner staff. Participating families are also not representative of the population that the programs or schools serve. Instead, we aimed to obtain variation in families' experiences to understand engagement with the range of transition activities and supports within a given site.

All participants were offered a gift card in appreciation for their time and expertise immediately following their interview.

Table 3. Number of Participants by Case and Role

Participant Roles	Case 1	Case 2[a]		Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Total
		LEA-a	*LEA-b*				
Head Start Director	2	1	N/A	1	1	3	**8**
Attempted Outreach	2	1	N/A	1	1	3	
Head Start Manager/Coordinator	0	2	N/A	2	2	2	**8**
Attempted Outreach	2	2	N/A	2	2	2	
Community Partner	1	0	N/A	1	0	1	**3**
Attempted Outreach	1	1	N/A	1	0	1	
Head Start Center Director	1	0	N/A	1	1	1	4

Participant Roles	Case 1	Case 2[a]		Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Total
		LEA-a	*LEA-b*				
Attempted Outreach	1	0	N/A	1	1	1	
Head Start Teacher	2	1	N/A	2	2	2	**9**
Attempted Outreach	2	2	N/A	2	2	2	
Elementary School Principal	1	0	1	1	1	0	**4**
Attempted Outreach	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Kindergarten Teacher	2	0	2	2	1	1	**8**
Attempted Outreach	2	2	2	2	1	2	
LEA District Staff/Administrator	3	2	0	1	2	3	**11**
Attempted Outreach	3	2	1	3	2	3	
Elementary School Staff	1	0	0	1	1	0	**3**
Attempted Outreach	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Kindergarten Parents	0	0	N/A	4	1	0	**5**
Attempted Outreach	1	1	N/A	4	3	0	
Head Start Parents[5]	4	1	N/A	12	5	1	**23**
Total Participants	**17**	**10**		**24**	**17**	**14**	**86**

[a] Initially, Case 2 was solely focused on the Head Start partnership with LEA-a, conducting interviews with Head Start staff about their partnership with LEA-a and with the LEA-a superintendent and one LEA administrator. However, we were not able to interview any elementary school staff in LEA-a. Therefore, the research team added another partner LEA (LEA-b) to obtain elementary school perspectives on partnering with Head Start. Thus, Case 2 does not provide a coherent picture of both the sending and receiving sides where both sides share a perspective of the same relationship.

Data Analysis Procedures

Staff Interviews, Parent Focus Groups, and Kindergarten Parent Interviews

We used both deductive and inductive techniques to code the interview and focus group data. Case study leads first developed a draft codebook of a priori codes based on the research questions, HS2K theory of change, and constructs. The broader coding and analysis team met weekly to hold targeted, consensus-building discussions to answer specific questions and discuss convergent or conflicting coding and themes, as well as to review inductive codes that emerged. Case study leads added and refined these

[5] Outreach to Head Start parents was conducted by Head Start programs. As such, we do not have counts for the number of parents to whom outreach was conducted.

additional inductive codes following these meaning-making sessions. See **Appendix B** for final codebooks.

Following each site visit, the interview and focus group audio files were sent for transcription. Once transcripts were returned, team members cleaned and prepared the interview and focus group transcripts for coding. This included scrubbing transcripts of all personally identifiable information (PII). Transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose, a mixed methods research software. Prior to coding, all coders were trained in how to use the codebook. Each transcript was coded by one of the interviewers assigned to the relevant case. Another interviewer conducted a second round of coding. Both coders held consensus-building discussions around any differences or disagreements. The case study leads then conducted random spot-checks of coded transcripts to check agreement with coding decisions and gauge inter-rater reliability. Kindergarten parent interviews were coded alongside the interview protocol, with each parent's answer to each question organized into a matrix. Parent responses to each interview question were read together to summarize themes across question topics.

Using the query tools in Dedoose, the team retrieved coded data relevant to the research questions and conducted a tiered analysis, where we pulled main analytic codes and sub-codes (also referred to as "child" and "grandchild" codes), to identify key themes within each case. Coding teams created separate analytic memos aligned with the research questions that contained detailed summaries of responses with significant quotational evidence attached to each statement and conclusion.

These analytic memos served as the foundation for individual case study writeups that addressed multiple topics: the definition of a successful transition to kindergarten; alignment of the 4Ps within- and across systems; transition practices and strategies, including professional supports; partnerships and relationships to support transitions across systems; transition-related policies; and perceived short- and long-term outcomes of transition strategies and practices. Findings from the five individual case studies formed the basis of the cross-case analyses presented here.

Family Background Questionnaires

Information collected from the family questionnaires during the focus groups was analyzed to gain a better descriptive understanding of the sample of families that participated in the focus groups. These analyses included descriptive statistics—frequencies, percentages, and means.

Staff Collaboration Survey

Forty-seven participants completed the HS2K staff collaboration survey across the five cases, resulting in a response rate of 81%. To evaluate the staff collaboration survey, we examined three key measures by participant role:

- The number of collaborators.
- The frequency of collaborations.
- The degree to which collaboration was “instrumental” to the participant’s work around transitions.

We analyzed each case individually in addition to all cases in aggregate. During analysis, team members triangulated the staff collaboration data with descriptions gleaned from the interviews. In particular, our team examined the extent to which participants reported cross-system collaborations.

Document Review

Documents, such as MOUs, kindergarten event flyers, and transition-focused handouts for families, were reviewed alongside the interview and focus group transcripts and pulled excerpts. Documents were used primarily to cross-check interview and focus group data and to add contextual information to individual case writeups.

Cross Case Analysis

We conducted cross-case analyses starting with each individual case write-up’s emergent themes. We created a set of analytic memos organized by research question that contained matrices, summaries, and notes to cross-check these emergent themes and patterns found across each case. In particular, we looked for variation across cases by:

- Configuration
- Community context (e.g., changing demographics, resource rich/poor communities, and other resources to support transitions)
- Structural characteristics (e.g., agency type, whether co-located or not)
- Length of Head Start/LEA partnership
- Programmatic features (e.g., differentiation for special populations/children with disabilities, cultural relevance)

To boost internal validity, the team leveraged parallel findings across interview data, documents, and staff collaboration surveys to confirm broader themes and takeaways.

Limitations of Interpretations Based on Case Study Methods

Implications of Purposive Sampling and Self-Selection

Because of the purposive nature of our sampling and the nomination process, our findings are limited in their external validity and generalizability. Our sample was purposive and not randomized; we asked for nominations for Head Start and LEAs partnerships that had innovative or promising transition approaches. Notably, we did not receive nominations for grantees representing agencies within territories or tribal nations. Given the intricate and divergent policy contexts across territorial and tribal nations, kindergarten transitions may look meaningfully different than those in our case studies.

The primary limitation of our case-specific sampling is self-selection of participants, meaning our Head Start and LEA contacts chose which staff were invited to participate in interviews. We were not able to interview every person involved in transitions for each site and are, therefore, inevitably missing important perspectives in each of the cases. Additionally, because we focused on a partnership between one Head Start program, one LEA, and one elementary school within that LEA, we cannot assume the same practices happened in all elementary schools within that LEA or with *all* of a Head Start program's partner LEAs.

Context-Specific Findings are Not Generalizable

Together, our sampling and nomination process limitations mean that our case studies cannot produce knowledge generalizable to a larger population. Rather, they are illustrative and in-depth explorations of relationships and practices in their specific contexts. We captured the experiences and perceptions of the people involved; therefore, this case study will not be able to answer how transition efforts or activities actually led to student or family outcomes or make causal connections. Rather, our study highlights staff and family perceptions of transition-related efforts as well as perceptions of how those efforts have made a difference for children and families transitioning from Head Start to kindergarten. This study also provided insights about potential mechanisms that could be studied from a causal perspective in the future.

Impact of COVID-19 on Data Collection

Our original data collection plan included onsite interviews and focus groups in spring of 2021. As noted above, pandemic-related disruptions to the Head Start and K-12 landscape necessitated a one-year delay. This delay in data collection may have impacted the results of our case studies in four key ways:

1. Partnerships, staffing within sites, and the ways in which staff in these sites supported Head Start to kindergarten transitions may have changed in important ways pre- and post-shutdown. For example, the pandemic altered school policies and practices related to parent engagement.
2. Many partnerships were put on pause for extended periods of time as policymakers, administrators, and teaching staff created a 'new normal' in real time. We note throughout this report, wherever possible, whether some of the partnerships or practices were halted or disrupted due to COVID.
3. New practices and strategies emerged from the lessons and limitations of the pandemic. Throughout the report, we note the places where and in what ways COVID impacted relationships, partnering activities, and transition-related practices. For example, in some locations, staff began offering caregivers the option of meeting virtually rather than in person.
4. COVID prevented us from conducting direct in-person recruitment for focus groups, which may have limited the extent of parental participation.

Chapter 2: Context of the Cases

Introduction

The cases included in this study were selected to represent variation along the dimensions outlined in the previous chapter (see *Site Selection*). In **Table 4**, we describe the background and demographic context for each case, including the structure of the Head Start agency, the configuration, urbanity, geographic location, and a description of the community served.

Within this study, we had variation along a number of structural and contextual dimensions. For example, our cases represent a variety of different types of Head Start agencies, including non-profit community action agencies and one private non-profit program. In one case (Case 2), we interviewed staff from two different LEAs. The cases in our sample represented a range in urbanicity and geographic location. Lastly, we had diverse representation of communities served in our sample, including variation in demographic characteristics of the community, urbanicity, and size.

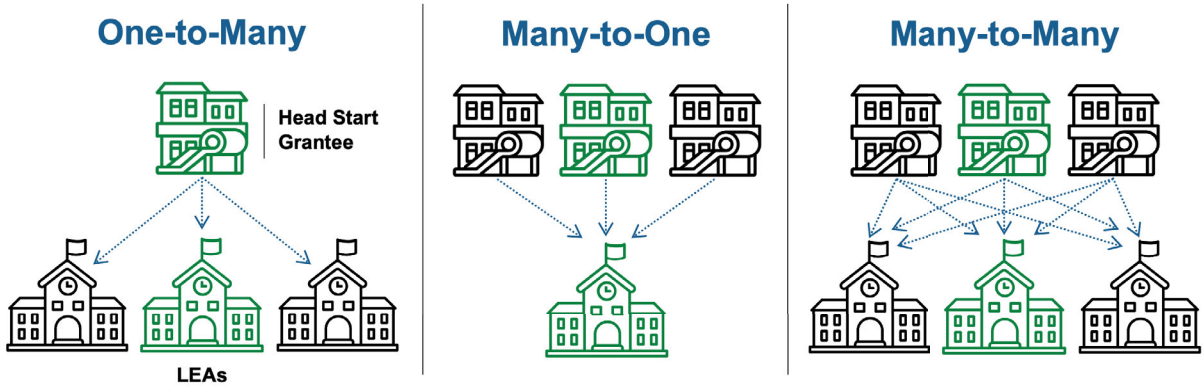
We also had a range of different configurations within our cases. Configurations refers to the constitution of Head Start programs/centers and LEAs/schools who share feeder patterns of children between Head Start and kindergarten. We define the three types of configurations represented in our study as:

- **One-to-Many**: There is only one Head Start program in an area. Children enroll in multiple schools within multiple LEAs for kindergarten. The Head Start classrooms can be in the same or different schools in which kindergarten classrooms are located.
- **Many-to-One**: There are multiple Head Start programs in an area. These Head Start children transition into one LEA, although there may be multiple elementary schools within that one LEA.
- **Many-to-Many**: There are multiple Head Start programs in an area. Children from these Head Start programs enroll in kindergarten in multiple LEAs (which may also have multiple elementary schools, with multiple kindergarten classrooms).

Figure 6 shows how these configurations might look and the increased complexity that emerges when there are multiple Head Start programs and/or multiple LEAs serving the same children. Importantly, while our case studies include cases that represent all three of these examples, our case study *participants* only came from one Head Start program, one of their centers, one LEA, and one of their elementary schools (with the exception of Case 2; see more below). Within **Figure 6**, our case studies were only able to gain

insight into a portion of this complexity, a single Head Start—LEA connection embedded within broader (and often complex) systems. It also means that what we learn about that one partnership may not apply to other partnerships within the configuration.

Figure 6. Head Start-LEA Configurations



Note: *These may include either one or multiple Head Start centers under a Head Start grantee. These may also include one or more elementary schools under an LEA.*

In addition to the Head Start-LEA configuration, the case study participants—those in one Head Start program (and its designated center) and in one LEA (and designated school)—represented different scenarios in terms of co-location and whether there were blended pre-k classrooms. **Figure 7** shows that in most of our cases, the Head Start classrooms included in our interviews were "co-located" within schools or on a school campus. Case 5 is the only case where Head Start children and interviewed staff were located in a center that was not in a school building.

Additionally (to note), most cases represented situations where Head Start children were "blended" with children in other pre-k programs in single classrooms. The exception to this was Case 3. This context is important in understanding participants' perspectives about collaboration and coordination with the "K-12 system." In many situations, we heard that there were collaboration efforts with the K-12 system that focused on aligning Head Start and pre-k (within-grade alignment), which makes sense given all the blended classrooms. Also, in many instances there was discussion of alignment efforts with kindergarten. However, when Case 3 Head Start participants discussed collaboration and alignment efforts with the K-12 system, they were exclusively focused on alignment with *kindergarten.*

Figure 7. Which Case Participants Included Co-location and Had Blended pre-K Classrooms

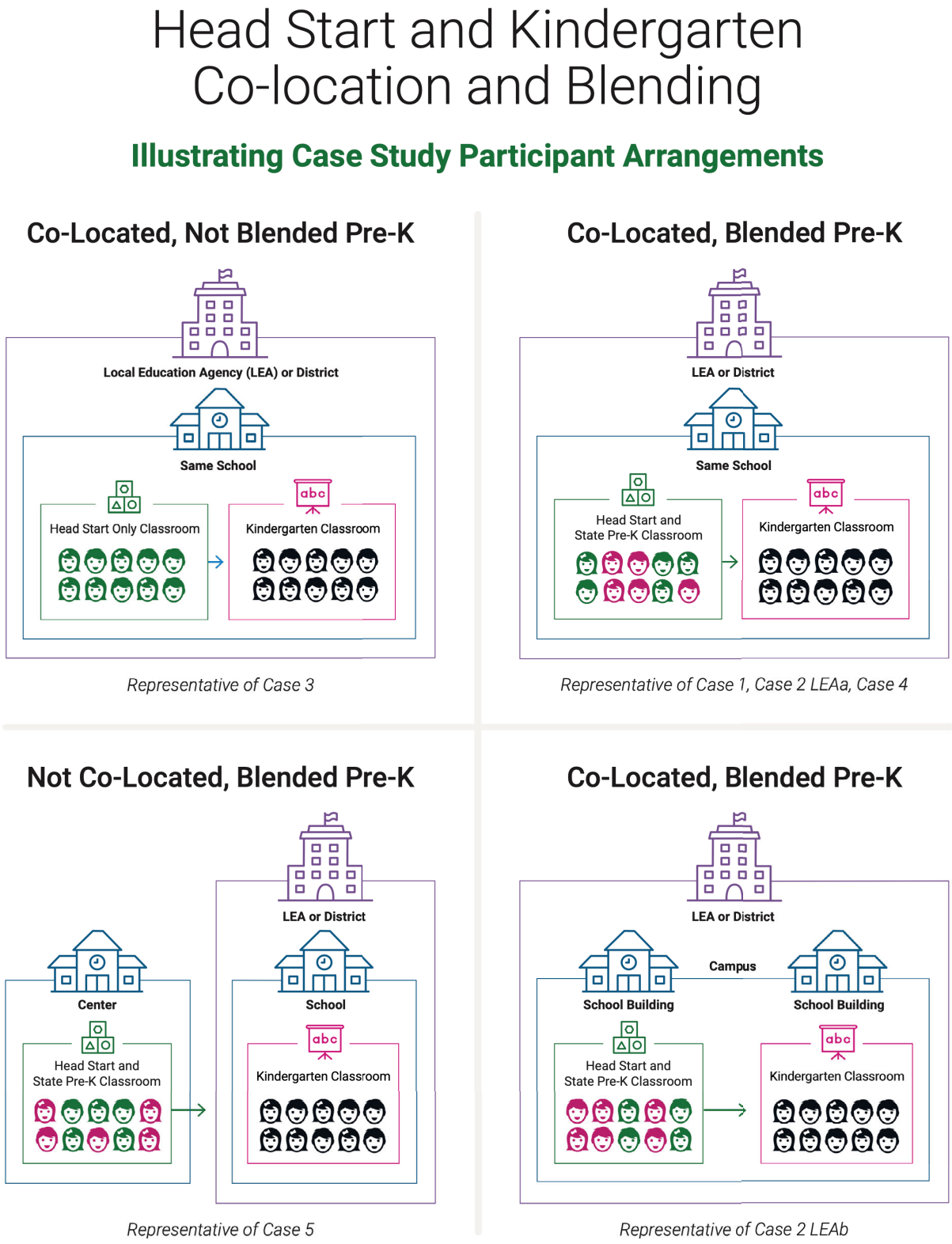


Table 4. Information on Each Case

Case	Head Start Agency Type	Configuration	Urbanicity	Geographic Location	Number of Elementary Schools	Number of Kindergarten Classrooms	Community Served	ECE Delivery Model	Co-Located Head Start Classrooms
1	Non-Profit Community Action Agency (CAA)	One-to-Many: One Head Start grant recipient sends children to four different LEAs	Rural Small	Midwest	<3	~4[6]	Predominantly White, English speaking	Mixed Delivery with Head Start and state and other types of funded pre-k in same classroom in elementary school	Yes
2	Non-Profit Community Action Program (CAP)	One-to-Many: One Head Start grant recipient sends children to five different LEAs	Town, Remote	Midwest	LEA-a: <10 LEA-b: <3	LEA-a: ~16 LEA-b: ~2	LEA-a predominantly White with growing Native American population LEA-b, evenly split between White and Native American families	Mixed Delivery with Head Start and state-funded pre-k in same classroom in elementary school	Yes

[6] To protect the identify of the Cases, we used approximations for the number of schools and classrooms.

Case	Head Start Agency Type	Configuration	Urbanicity	Geographic Location	Number of Elementary Schools	Number of Kindergarten Classrooms	Community Served	ECE Delivery Model	Co-Located Head Start Classrooms
3	Non-Profit Community Action Agency (CAA)	Many-to-One: Many Head Start grant recipients and children can enroll in multiple schools within one LEA	City Large	Western	>50	~50	White, Latino, Asian Pacific, AIAN, Native Hawaiian, Black and a growing immigrant population	Only Head Start classroom within elementary school	Yes
4	Private, non-profit corporation	Many-to-Many: Many Head Start grant recipients send children to many different LEAs	Suburb Large	Eastern	<10	~20	Predominantly Hispanic and/or Latino, with a smaller portion of White and Black families; a small population of Spanish speakers	Mixed Delivery with Head Start and state-funded pre-k in same classroom in elementary school	Yes
5	Non-Profit Community Action Agency (CAA)	One-to-Many: One Head Start grant recipient sends children to many different LEAs in the same county	City Midsize	Western	<10	~18	Predominantly Hispanic and/or Latino, with a high population of Spanish speakers	Mixed Delivery with Head Start and state-funded pre-k in same classroom in elementary school	Yes, in some instances, but not for our case study participants

Understanding Cross-System Alignment: A Focus on Vertical vs. Horizonal Alignment

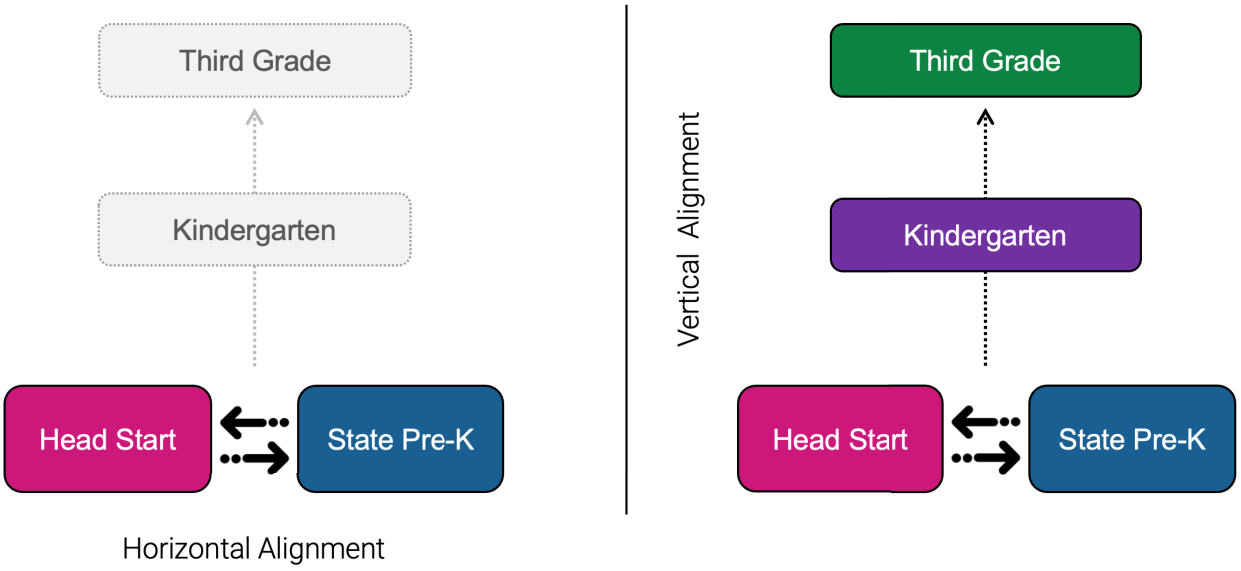
The primary focus of this study is on cross-system partnerships and alignment between Head Start and LEAs/elementary schools (such as alignment of curriculum and assessments as well as alignment in perspectives) to support children as they transition from one system into the other. We refer to this type of alignment as *vertical* alignment (what some might call "grade-to-grade" alignment) because alignment efforts are focused on children moving from one grade level (preschool) to the next (kindergarten). Our study aimed to better understand vertical alignment and how the two systems partnered to align vertically in supporting transitions. This reflects our goal to study both the "sending" side (Head Start) and the "receiving" side (kindergarten/elementary school). However, when we asked Head Start and LEA participants in our cases to tell us about how they partner to support children's and families' transitions into kindergarten, many perceived cross-system alignment differently than how we defined it. In four of the five cases, Head Start participants talked about their alignment efforts *within* the same "grade level"—with their partner LEA preschool program.[7] We refer to Head Start-to-other-preschool-program alignment as *horizontal* alignment because in these situations alignment efforts are focused on alignment within the broader ECE system for the various "sending" sides. Horizontal alignment does not involve alignment with the "receiving" (kindergarten) side.

This unexpected finding is reflective of the emerging context and added programmatic complexity of the ECE and K-12 systems. In recent years, they have been increasingly overlapping with pre-k classrooms that are embedded within schools and K-12 systems (See **Figure 8** below). Many states, for example, have made it a priority to expand access to preschool to all children. As noted in **Chapter 1**, many LEAs have elementary schools that now include preschool classrooms to help serve this need. This has resulted in a significant shift, whereby LEAs have greater responsibility over preschool. In addition, more and more classrooms are blended, which means that they have children who receive Head Start *and* other types of funding within the same classrooms. Principals are now tasked with overseeing and hiring preschool teachers, and principal preparation programs have had to adapt to include more early childhood education training for school leaders in addition to the standards, rules, and regulations of the K-12 system.

[7] The exception was Case 3, because there was only a Head Start classroom within the Case elementary school and no other state-funded preschool classrooms in the same building.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this added complexity was reflected in the conversations we had with case study participants about their partnerships and their efforts to support kindergarten transitions. In places where Head Start children were integrated with and taught by the same teachers as other preschool children, our study participants focused more on describing alignment among the various preschool programs to create more continuity. In Case 1, for example, their cross-systems efforts focused on aligning Head Start with the LEA preschool. Only recently have staff in Case 1 begun to coordinate and build relationships that crossed over into the K-12 system—between preschool (both Head Start and the LEA-based preschool) *and* kindergarten. Similarly, in Cases 2, 4, and 5, most of the partnerships that work between Head Start and school-based staff had been focused on vertical alignment between ECE programs, centered around alignment of preschool curriculum and assessments as well as sharing of materials and activities. Case 3, however, did not have any other preschool programs within the elementary school site we studied. Thus, their alignment efforts were all focused on the horizontal alignment between Head Start and kindergarten—representing the true cross-system (Head Start to K-12) partnership and alignment this study sought to better understand.

Figure 8. Two Types of Alignment



While horizontal alignment among the various preschool/ECE programs was not the intended focus of this study, the fact that it emerged as a major theme in four out of the five cases impacted both our analyses and interpretation of results. We treated horizontal alignment as an emergent analytic construct because Head Start programs were embedded within multiple ECE systems. In other words, cross-system partnering was more nuanced and complex than we initially identified in the HS2K theory of change. As mentioned in Chapter 1, ECE itself is complex and the lines between ECE

and the K-12 system are increasingly blurred. Reducing the ‘jolt’ for children and families during the transition, therefore, may involve streamlining and creating more continuity as a first step so that teachers on the “sending” side of the transition are sharing the same language with one another, parents, and the larger educational community. This may create more consistency in children’s preschool experiences so that by the time they reach kindergarten, there is less complexity presented to kindergarten teachers who are “receiving” those children. Throughout this report, we identified when a participant was talking about or referring to horizontal (within-grade/ECE) alignment and when they were talking about vertical (across-grade) alignment with kindergarten.

The following chapters provide an overview of findings across the five cases with a focus on the 4Ps—Perspectives, Policies, Professional supports, and Practices.

Chapter 3: Perspectives on Transitions to Kindergarten



Key Takeaways

The following are key findings on participants' perspectives of transitions to kindergarten, including definitions of transition timeline and success, and perspectives on transition practices and strategies (**RQ1**), in addition to participants' perspectives on the perceived benefits and/or outcomes of transition-related practices and strategies (**RQ 3**).

- Most staff and parents perceived that the Head Start to kindergarten transition had a definitive start and talked about specific milestones that marked the start of the transition.
- Staff shared their own personal perspectives of transition time points and milestones rather than identifying or relying upon an institutionally agreed-upon definition of when transitions begin and end; this suggests that there were no official or agreed-upon definitions in the cases.
- Participants across the cases perceived that a successful transition, among other things, meant making sure that children were "kindergarten ready."
- In one of the cases, expectations and perspectives on kindergarten readiness were aligned between Head Start and LEAs; in the others, there were strong differences in beliefs. However, these differences in perspectives did not seem driven by Head Start and kindergarten teacher relationships. Rather, teachers may have had positive relationships, but differing perspectives on transitions.
- Perspectives within LEAs on successful transition outcomes for children and families focus more on academic skills than on social-emotional skills.

Introduction

The HS2K theory of change hypothesizes that the perspectives of educators, administrators, and families—including their vision, values, and beliefs about transitions—directly influence the implementation of transition-related policies and

practices. Research has shown that the alignment of perspectives can help support the collaborative process for establishing joint kindergarten transition strategies from both systems—Head Start and K-12 (Ehrlich et al., 2021). Perspectives are defined, in this context, as different stakeholders' (i.e., child/families', teachers', administrators') visions, values, and beliefs about transitions to kindergarten, including their and others' roles in supporting transitions to kindergarten. For example, evidence of aligned perspectives may mean similar answers to questions such as: What does it mean to be ready for kindergarten? What is the role of the parent versus teacher versus administrators and schools? What is the role of Head Start versus kindergarten? Furthermore, alignment of perspectives is the extent to which there are shared and/or complementary understandings of kindergarten transitions among involved parties, both within and across the Head Start and K-12 systems. Past research has largely focused on the perspectives of one side of the system at a time and left out the administrator perspective. These studies, such as Brown and colleagues' (2023) case study examining perspectives of kindergarten from teachers and parents in an urban pre-kindergarten, contribute to our knowledge of perspectives from one side of the system about the other side but cannot look at (mis)alignment across the two systems.

The HS2K Project's hypothesis is rooted in established implementation science literature, as well as more limited research that has begun to link greater misalignment in educator perspectives with poorer social-emotional and academic outcomes for children (Ehrlich et al., 2021). To further examine potential linkages between perspective alignment, transition policy and practice implementation, and outcomes, our case studies probed participants' existing knowledge of, beliefs about, and interpretations of each other's roles, as well as their definitions of both kindergarten readiness and a "successful" transition. These case studies are the first to systematically document administrator perspectives related to the kindergarten transition, and they are the first to simultaneously examine perspective alignment both within *and* across the Head Start and K-12 systems. Findings contribute to the emergent literature on contextual factors that may influence the degree of alignment (e.g., shared professional development, cross-system standards, state policy context, co-location) and the mechanisms or moderators that can play intermediary roles (e.g., relationships, communication structures).

To understand how participants across the cases thought about and defined what it means to have a successful transition, we focused on participants' perspectives. Perspectives on transitions are important because they represent how participants view and think about their work in supporting transitions and how those views drive their work of supporting transitions. Among other things, perspectives provide clues to the values that participants place on supporting transitions, their vision and hope for what it looks like when transitions go well, their beliefs about who benefits from transition-related practices and strategies, and how they may benefit.

As outlined above, we are interested in the alignment of perspectives to better understand the extent to which different people across the system approach transitions with similar or different mindsets and intentions. We also examine whether there are shared or complementary understandings of kindergarten transitions across the system. In this section of the report, we provide overall perspectives on how participants think about when the transition process begins and ends, how they define a successful transition to kindergarten, where perspectives are aligned or misaligned, and how those impact transition-related efforts.

Transition Timelines and Milestones

To better understand how participants perceived and contextualized the transition from Head Start to kindergarten, we asked staff to identify when the transition process begins and ends. We posed the following question to all staff participants: When do you consider the transition process to begin and end? Participants tended to answer with a specific time period (i.e., a month or quarter) and/or by talking about a transition-related milestone (i.e., when data are shared with teachers or parents or when conversations happen with families about kindergarten).

Three major themes emerged from participant perspectives on when transitions begin and end:

- **Definitive Start, without a Definitive End**: The transition from Head Start to kindergarten has a definitive start point, but no end point because it is fluid and ongoing. (*N*=22)
- **Definitive Start and End**: The transition from Head Start to kindergarten has a definitive start point and a definitive end point. (N=19)
- **Fluid**: The transition from Head Start to kindergarten is fluid and ongoing with no definitive start point and no definitive end point. Participants described it as an ongoing process. (*N*=11). Table 5 below provides the number of Head Start and LEA participants whose perspectives fell into each category.

The majority of staff responded that the transition period has a definitive starting point or talked about specific milestones that marked the start of the Head Start to kindergarten transition. However, many answered the question by saying that they did not know when transitions ended or said that it varied by child and family. Head Start staff were more likely than LEA staff to define the transition time period this way and to specifically say that transitions begin the moment a child enters

KEY FINDING

Head Start staff were more likely than LEA staff to define the transition start time as the moment a child enters Head Start.

Head Start. Several participants—both Head Start and LEA—mentioned specific milestones that kicked off the transition period, but then talked about a more continuous transition process without a clear ending. For example, participants described:

> *"We need to start transition from the minute they start in three-year-old preschool in our building. And we're starting the transition then, and we're starting the transition in kindergarten to be a good first grader and a good first grader to be a good second grader. So, I don't think we see it as a word that means, oh, we transition now... I think it's really more fluid and it's every day, ongoing, in discussion." (Head Start Director, Case 1)*

> *"I'd say as soon as I get that class list, that transition is starting, for me anyway. And then that open house is a huge turning point because you finally get to meet the kids. And then to be honest, the end, it's hard to choose that because I am a first-year teacher. So, the beginning was difficult for me. But I feel that it's May now, and I feel like we're on a good path. So, I don't know that it really truly ends until kindergarten is over." (LEA-b Kindergarten Teacher, Case 2)*

> *"The simplest version, I would say is that the transition starts in the spring prior to entry. But in all reality, it's as soon as that child starts interacting with other peers. As soon as that child and that family are interacting outside of their household is a transition, right?" (LEA District Administrator, Case 3)*

> *"It begins when we meet families because that's part of our mission is to prepare children for successful transition to kindergarten. I think the transition...it never, like, totally ends." (Head Start Manager/Coordinator, Case 4)*

Several Head Start and LEA staff marked both the transition beginning and ending in terms of specific events tied to activities that happened during the school year. Many Head Start staff defined the end point as once children were in kindergarten or enrolled in their new school. For example, Head Start staff described the transition process this way:

> *"I feel like as soon as they walk in through the doors, it's getting them ready and prepared for them to have a successful transition, you know, in June, when they're ready to leave us and then go in September." (Head Start Teacher, Case 4)*

> *"When we talk about transitions in our program, our family advocates actually start that piece when the school district starts the registration process. We reach out to them. We let them know that registration for kindergarten is happening. Do you have any questions? Do you need help getting the packets? The transition ends when they move on to kindergarten." (Head Start Manager/Coordinator, Case 5)*

Lastly, when participants described transitions as being fluid, they often described transitions as being more of a process. For example, LEA administrators said when we posed the question:

> *"Oh, that's kind of tricky. I feel, you know, we're always trying to get them ready for their next step, so it's always getting ready for the next transition." (LEA Administrator, Case 1)*

> *"I don't really ever consider it having either a beginning or an end. It's a continuous process. It's always evolving." (LEA Administrator, Case 4)*

Similarly, one Head Start Director in Case 5 echoed the LEA sentiments, saying that transitions are an "ongoing process from the beginning."

Another LEA Administrator said that transition periods are fluid because they may not be the same for every child, highlighting,

> *"It's very much along the lines of a spectrum and for every student seems to be a little bit different." (LEA Administrator, Case 2).*

Similarly, a Head Start manager/coordinator in Case 3 emphasized that it "depends on the family," noting that the Head Start program will follow up with families—even after they have gone onto kindergarten—if there are siblings still in the program. Previously, the program conducted a survey with families to check in once the child had transitioned (a pre-COVID procedure). **Table 5** shows the number of participants by Head Start and LEA who defined the transition period by the three main perspectives. Overall, LEA staff were more likely to describe transition processes as ongoing and fluid versus Head Start staff.

Table 5. Summary of Transition Timeline and Milestones by Case

Case	Transition process has no definitive start or end		Transition process has a definitive start, but no definitive end		Transition process has a definitive start and end	
	Head Start	**LEA**	**Head Start**	**LEA**	**Head Start**	**LEA**
1	0	2	2	4	3	1
2	0	2	1	1	3	2
3	0	0	3*	1	1	3**
4	0	1	3	1	2	2
5	3	3	4	2	2	0
% of total	**27%**	**73%**	**59%**	**41%**	**58%**	**42%**

Notes: *Two Head Start teachers defined starting points but did not answer the question about end points. **One LEA staff defined a starting point but did not answer the question about an end point.

Degree of Alignment in Perspectives of Transition Timeline and Milestones

Given the responsibilities of each system—including when they first begin to interact with children and families—one might expect that perspectives on transition timelines to differ from one another. Indeed, there were some differences between Head Start staff and LEA staff that represent each of their unique roles in children and families' lives. Those differences may or may not matter to the extent that they inhibit or prohibit collaboration during some phases of the transition process (e.g., when children are younger or once children begin kindergarten).

Overall, we did not find a lot of congruence in how participants defined the transition time period within or across the cases. In other words, transition time periods are not well defined, and staff are operating with differing perspectives. While not all aligned, staff found it easier to define transition starting points than ending points. In only one of the cases (Case 3), participants were more closely aligned in their perspectives about the transition timeline. However, teachers—both Head Start and kindergarten—were more likely to talk about having a definitive start and end time, marked by transition-related milestones, compared with other Head Start and LEA staff.

KEY FINDING

Transition time periods are not well-defined and staff across cases and across the two systems are operating with differing perspectives.

A few overall patterns emerged from across these cases. First, compared with LEA staff, fewer Head Start staff defined the transition time period as more fluid. This may be because for the Head Start side of the system, the point at which transitions begin tended to be more concrete, such as the first contact with families, the moment a child enters into the system, and/or the very first day a child enters Head Start. LEA staff, on the other hand, were more mixed in their perspectives, with some LEA staff not seeing a definitive start point, and others clearly identifying a start point.

Overall, we found that teachers were more likely to articulate a definitive timeframe for transitions compared with administrators and other staff. For example, as stated above, several Head Start teachers remarked that the transition process begins "on day one" or "as soon as the child enrolls" in Head Start or the beginning of the preschool year. Similarly, kindergarten teachers spoke of kindergarten registration as a significant milestone. The registration process marked both the beginning of the transition for kindergarten teachers and the ending of the transition for some Head Start teachers. Teachers may have more concrete timelines because they have children in their classroom for a set amount of time. Administrators, on the other hand, are more distal and tasked with thinking about the whole system and, therefore, focus on different aspects of the Head Start-LEA partnership, such as MOUs.

Third, besides registration, participants on both the Head Start and LEA sides talked about other transition-related milestones such as the last few months of the preschool year when Head Start teachers begin having conversations with kindergarten teachers, when organizing classroom visits, when family engagement or orientation-type events occur, and when conversations with parents happen. Most participants viewed these milestones as the start of the transition. Other Head Start staff described the time when children are placed into kindergarten classrooms as indicating an end point for transitions. Teacher transition time period definitions were usually marked by practice-related milestones.

KEY FINDING

Staff across systems described transition timelines and milestones as personal perceptions rather than institutionally agreed upon definitions.

Overall, these variations suggest that some view the transition as a process and others think about it in terms of when certain milestones take place or when transition-related activities begin or end. In addition, staff described transition timelines and milestones as being their personal perception rather than identifying an institutionally agreed-upon definition.

The variability in terms of how different Head Start programs conceptualized the transition time period is consistent with prior research on this topic. For example, data from the nationally representative Head Start Family and Child Experiences Study (FACES: 2009) showed that 95% of directors reported having a formal transition process in place, but varied in when they reported that the process began. While 37% noted the process started at the beginning of the school year, 38% reported it began halfway through the year, 22% a few months before the end of the year, and 2% a few weeks before the year ended (Cook & Coley, 2020). However, similar research has not been done until now on LEA perspectives on transition timelines and how they are or are not aligned with Head Start timelines.

Definitions of Transition Success and Perceived Outcomes for Children, Families, and Staff

In addition to asking participants to define the transition time period and report on specific transition-related milestones, we also asked participants to define what it means to have a successful transition to kindergarten. Specifically, we asked, “What does a ‘successful transition to kindergarten’ mean to you?” We probed participants to think about what transition success means for children, families, and teachers and asked them to tell us about any potential transition-related benefits they have seen because of their transition-related efforts. We also asked participants to tell us what positive short- and long-term outcomes they saw or envisioned happening for children, families, and

teachers and staff due to transition-related efforts. Participants tended to answer with similar responses to these two sets of questions, although there were some slight variations. Outcomes were not generally discussed by participants in terms of tracked data or formal evaluation findings, but rather through examples of what staff and teachers do to support children and families so they will have a successful transition. For many of the participants, they defined transition success in terms of the types of skills children bring to kindergarten; the level of family involvement and engagement in the transition process; and the comfort level of families already familiar with the environment, expectations, and staff.

Overall, participants, especially teachers and parents, defined a successful transition for children as being about both academic and social-emotional readiness for kindergarten. Outcomes or benefits were perceived as children having particular skills in these areas by the time they entered kindergarten so that they were set up for success. Staff participants also defined success in terms of parents' and children's comfort levels in kindergarten. Participants expressed that transition benefits or outcomes included parents feeling safe and welcomed into the kindergarten learning environment.

Table 6 highlights the broad themes that emerged from staff and parents' definition of a successful transition and perceived outcomes for children and families, along with illustrative quotes.

Table 6. Illustrative Quotes about Perceived Outcomes for Children & Families

A successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for children and families meant…	Illustrative quotes
Children have the academic and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills needed to have a successful start to kindergarten. (Cases 1, 2, and 3) Therefore, children are ready for kindergarten academically AND… …children are ready for kindergarten social-emotionally.	• "And I don't ever want to downplay the importance of academic knowledge, letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, the ability to count, the ability to quantify, recognize small sets, subitizing with dice. I don't ever want to downplay the importance of that. But I would say, social-emotional competencies, for me'', I'll just say they are more Important. It, to me, makes more sense to have a child who maybe doesn't know every sound that every letter makes. But if they have the ability to comfortably ask their neighbor for help, or comfortably ask the teacher, that they feel good with that, I feel that that student might have as much if not more success as a student who knows every lowercase letter and every letter sound." (Head Start Teacher, Case 1) • "So, I look at her being ready for kindergarten when she knows her letters and her sounds. But more importantly, that social development, like can she play with friends appropriately? Is she taking turns? Does she know how to be a good friend and a good student in the classroom? Those types of things." (Head Start Parent, Case 1) • "To me it means not necessarily that children entering kindergarten are academically prepared, counting to 100 let's say, or knowing all their colors or the alphabet. It's more about being socially and emotionally prepared to learn, to regulate their emotions, to be able to transition from one class or activity to another, and to get along and to have those social skills which allow us to function." (LEA-a Superintendent, Case 2) • "To me, it means sending students with just the basic skills to function inside the kindergarten classroom, that being the ability to walk in line, the ability to raise their hand and wait for a moment or two, a lot of the social aspects of sitting with peers for a story. And then on the academic sense, it's really helpful when students can at least write their name and identify the letters in their name…And then zero through ten, number identification and counting to 10 is ideal. Obviously, anything beyond that is just a cherry on top." (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 3) • "To help them prepare and know basic stuff before moving onto elementary school. Like knowing ABCs, recognize the letters, and like you trying to like help them know their sounds, also like their numbers too, like recognize their numbers, shapes, and colors, and position words." (Head Start Teacher, Case 3)

A successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for children and families meant…	Illustrative quotes
Families understand the academic and SEL expectations needed for kindergarten. (All Cases) Therefore, children and families understand kindergarten procedures, rules, and processes and know what to expect.	• "To let [the parents] know, 'So this is what they're expected to do.' Because a lot of parents, I've noticed both years, they think, 'Oh, my student is doing great. They're going to excel in kindergarten; they're going to do amazing.' And then unfortunately they get to kindergarten and I have to call and say, you know, 'Your son or daughter is struggling,' like, 'they're a little lower than I would like to see.'" (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 1) • "But like the transition into kindergarten and I think it's more about just the expectations that kindergarten puts into place that they expect you to already know is just having a little bit more readiness and transparency with what their expectations are." (Head Start Parent, Case 2) • "But a successful transition, I think it's just we're communicating with the parents and the families on what the expectation for school is in kindergarten." (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 3) • "That a family understands the importance of good attendance, that a family understands their role as their child's first teacher and their child's best advocate, that they're understanding that when we are sending a child off from our program to kindergarten, that their relationship with us doesn't end." (Head Start Coordinator/Manager, Case 4) • "It's really informing the parents, letting them know what the expectations are socially and emotionally for these kids entering kindergarten, and being there, you know, to support the parents' questions." (Head Start Director, Case 5)

A successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for children and families meant…	Illustrative quotes
Families and children feel safe, comfortable, and welcomed starting in Head Start and continuing into kindergarten. (All Cases) Therefore, children and families feel less overwhelmed or anxious and more comfortable because they are familiar with the learning environment and/or staff in elementary school.	• "Just making sure that successful transition means that they feel comfortable, they feel safe here, and they've had some exposure so that that they are ready to take on some of those kindergarten readiness skills, too." (Principal, Case 1) • "I'd say, feeling safe in their environment, feeling safe with who they're with, feeling that they're like comfortable enough to come to school, and that they are cared for, you know…The families need to know that you care about their kid and that you do love their kid. Because if they don't know that, they're not going to trust you. So, they need to know that you have their back too." (LEA-b Kindergarten Teacher, Case 2) • "I think it's back to feeling welcomed and [children and families] feeling like they're part of the school community…So it's just that feeling of belonging." (Principal, Case 3) • "The pre-k students feel comfortable with being in the kindergarten classroom on their first day." (LEA Administrator, Case 4) • "It's scary for parents that take that big step and go into this bigger space and not have the same kind of personal connections that they've had in their birth-to-five experiences with their child. And so, I think it's the key point in that transition is that it's the creation of a relationship. That they have confidence that their child's going into a safe environment to a teacher who is going to be listening, and accessible, and open to having conversations about their child." (Community Partner, Case 5)

A successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for children and families meant…	Illustrative quotes
All children, and in particular children with special needs, continue to receive the same kinds of supports and services they had in Head Start going into kindergarten. (Cases 1, 4 and 5). Therefore, children and families receive consistency in supports that are tailored to meet their needs immediately upon entering kindergarten, including continued support from the Head Start family service worker and—where applicable—wrap-around supports and services.	• "So, I think what benefits we get from [co-location] is early identification of maybe some learning issues or behavior issues or maybe there's some family supports that the families need. So …you've already maybe identified and worked with the parents and the team to try to give them what they need to be successful [once in kindergarten]." (LEA Superintendent, Case 1) • "It's important to me that when they move onto kindergarten, that they get that same kind of in-depth help that they need, whether it's through mental health workers or through itinerants who come into the classroom." (Head Start Director, Case 4) • "The family, who have received different services around the whole family approach, are very supported. They have access to many resources. They are a continuum, supporting through the goals, through the process, through what do they need in the community. So, a successful transition will be like at least part of the services go with them when they are in kindergarten." (Head Start Director, Case 5)

A successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for children and families meant…	Illustrative quotes
Parents are involved in the school and in the transition process. (Cases 1, 2, and 5) Therefore, families have awareness of what it means for their child to be kindergarten ready and support their child's learning at home AND… …families have what they need to advocate for their children once they are in kindergarten AND… …families know and understand the registration process and other procedural processes related to applying for kindergarten.	• "That [parents] have the opportunity in preschool, they have a lot more opportunity at school or like activity-wise involvement with the school…that they are hoping and wanting in kindergarten that there's going to be that communication between the parents and the teachers." (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 1) • "Supporting the families to be advocates for their child, which Head Start is such a great program for that. Two generation support. So really, it's just success for the parent would be to advocate for their child." (Head Start Director, Case 2) • "When families engage in the learning activities sent home by the Head Start teacher, The children get excited, and the children–it's like they know their parents care. That is so important. They want to achieve, they want their parents to see it. And I think that if the parents were more involved, they would know where they could also help their child." (Head Start Teacher, Case 2) • "Families understand their rights, and they understand how to advocate for themselves, and they understand what is okay, and what is not okay in terms of what happens to their children." (Head Start Teacher, Case 5)

A successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for children and families meant…	Illustrative quotes
Parents and children are familiar with the kindergarten and elementary school setting. (All Cases) Therefore, children and families understand kindergarten procedures, rules, and processes and know what to expect.	• "I think first of all, when you have threes and four-year-olds on your campus, in your building, for two years, and basically the teachers are getting to know these kids, the counselors, the nurse, the administration, you really have the benefit of actually knowing who these kids are when they're onsite." (Superintendent, Case 1) • "I think it means the family is prepared. They know the school, the teachers, the class. They're familiar with it. And I think both of the student and the family and the parent feeling comfortable and succeeding once they get into kindergarten, I think that makes for a successful transition." (Head Start Manager/Coordinator, Case 2) • "That children and families are connected with their next setting in a positive way and timely way, and that their experiences in Head Start and the value of those experiences are communicated in a way that facilitates success during their initial experience in school like everything with us, it's about relationships. So, for us a goal is always connection." (Head Start Director, Case 3) • "… especially as with the [school district] and the Head Start program together. They're right there. So, it does help for an easier transition, and to, you know, get to know the teachers, and what teachers are going to be there prior, and to see the classroom." (Head Start Parent, Case 4) • "I'm just going to call it the warm handoff. Like this is going to happen. There's the new teacher. I think the best scenario is being able to make those connections for the parents and the children." (Head Start Manager/Coordinator, Case 5)
Children and families feel like they are part of the Head Start and elementary school community. (Cases 1, 3 and 5) Therefore, families are aware that the relationship with Head Start does not end once their child enters kindergarten.	• "They [children and families] know the teaching staff already, just because they've seen them in the building…they're part of this system." (Community Partner, Case 1) • "That children and families are connected with their next setting in a positive way, positive and timely way, and that their experiences in Head Start and the value of those experiences are communicated in a way that facilitates success during their initial experience in school." (Head Start Director, Case 3) • "Families feel welcome and are able to ask questions is the base way that they are set up to be successful and are feeling successful and liking and enjoying school." (LEA Administrator, Case 5)

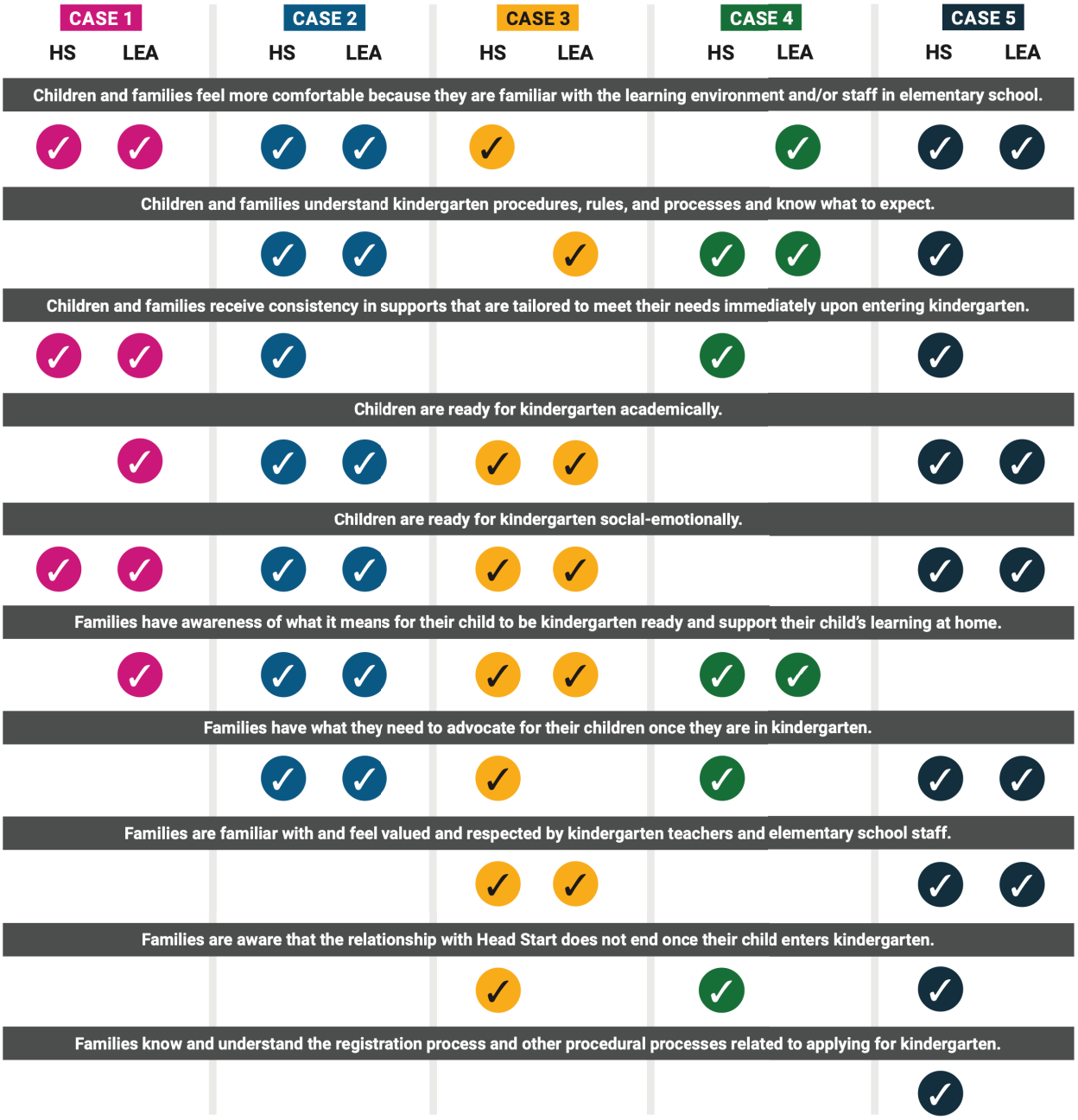
Table 7 summarizes how participants defined success as well as the perceived benefits and/or outcomes for children and families that were talked about in each case, broken

out by Head Start and LEA staff. A check mark indicates that at least one staff member or parent stated this as a sign of success and/or as a perceived benefit or outcome of transition-related efforts. Overall, this table shows that Cases 2 and 5 Head Start and LEA participants had more congruence in perceived success, benefits, and outcomes for children and families compared to participants in other cases. Head Start and LEA staff in three of the five cases mentioned the following benefits and/or outcomes of transition-related efforts: (1) families were aware of what it meant for their children to be kindergarten ready, (2) families knew how to support their children's learning at home, (3) families felt less overwhelmed or anxious because they were comfortable and familiar with the learning environment, and (4) children were academically ready for kindergarten. In four of the five cases, both Head Start and LEA staff perceived that a major benefit and/or outcome of transition-related supports was that children were ready social-emotionally for kindergarten.

Table 7. Perceived Benefits or Outcomes for Children & Families

Head Start to Kindergarten Perceived Benefits or Outcomes for Children and Families

We asked case study staff participants in both Head Start (HS) and Local Education Agencies (LEA) about how they defined a successful transition to kindergarten and their perceived benefits of collaborations for children and families.



Definitions of Transition Success and Perceived Outcomes/Benefits from Head Start Parents

Parents' perspectives across the cases were consistent regarding what it meant for their children to successfully transition to kindergarten. Parents were likely to define transition success in terms of their child(ren) being prepared and ready both academically and social-emotionally. Academic readiness was defined by parents as knowing letters and sounds, counting, preparing children for the curriculum they'd experience in kindergarten, knowing how to cut and color, and being able to write their names. Several Head Start parents also talked about readiness in terms of social and emotional development. For example, parents talked about their children knowing how to play with friends and take turns, as well as conducting tasks independently such as tying their own shoes. In addition, parents reported that success meant that their children were able to regulate their emotions, listen to teachers, and follow routines.

Successful transitions to kindergarten, therefore, result in families perceiving that their children are on track and ready for kindergarten.

KEY FINDING

For families, a successful transition means their child is on track and ready for kindergarten social-emotionally and academically.

For example, in Case 5, the one parent we interviewed expressed that the most helpful transition practice for them was the information they received about their child's performance during the parent-teacher conference. This parent talked about being aware of the skills their child was developing, which gave her comfort in knowing her child was learning and prepared for the kindergarten classroom. Similarly in the Case 1 parent focus group, a participant said:

> *"I look at her being ready for kindergarten when she knows her letters and her sounds. But more importantly, that social development, like can she play with friends appropriately? Is she taking turns? Does she know how to be a good friend and a good student in the classroom? Those types of things." (Head Start Parent Focus Group Participant, Case 1)*

A Case 3 Head Start parent also talked about social-emotional independence as a sign of a successful transition, explaining:

> *"I would say that [a successful] kindergarten transition would be to be able to do different tasks without, you know, interference, like a routine, and also to be able to, you know, listen to the teacher whenever they do a task, or if they were to tell them to do something, they would know how to do it. And also, to be able to self-regulate themselves." (Head Start Parent Focus Group Participant, Case 3)*

While parents talked about transition success in terms of social-emotional and academic readiness for their child(ren), a few also spoke about the importance of communicating with kindergarten teachers and other elementary school staff, such as school principals or student support staff (i.e., social workers, counselors, etc.). While not directly tied to their definition of success, these Head Start parents perceived that having strong communication and relationships with elementary staff will be important for a successful transition experience. For example, one Head Start parent in Case 1 perceived having positive relationships with the elementary school staff. She explained*, "I do think that I would feel comfortable to go and ask [the kindergarten teacher] more if I needed to."* Another Head Start parent, however, expressed some concerns about communicating and getting information from kindergarten teachers, especially as it relates to how their children were faring academically and getting supports for children:

> *"The communication piece, I guess would be just something I'm concerned about…So just making sure that it's being communicated if there's any concerns academically or behaviors, so then we can address it at home or help in any way that we can." (Head Start Parent, Case 1)*

Another Head Start parent of a child with special needs in Case 3 also mentioned some concerns about communication and supports in the elementary school, saying:

> *"My concern is that my child, she has special needs. But I believe the school district will follow up. The transition for her is not easy. But I believe she'll be doing well. I know the school has been really good for her, so I believe the transition, even if it's going to be different, I hope she'll be okay." (Head Start Parent, Case 3)*

While these concerns are not directly related to the question we posed about what it means to have a successful transition, they did point to the importance of strong communication and continuation of supports for transition success. Teachers echoed parents' sentiments by talking about the importance of relationships between parents and teachers throughout the transition process. As one teacher explained, *"So I think just those relationships are so important to have for a smooth transition."* (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 5)

Definitions of Transition Success and Perceived Outcomes for Teachers and Staff

When defining what transition success and benefits mean for teachers and staff, we saw some areas of congruence in how staff described what success looked like and what outcomes or benefits can happen when there is success. For example, in three of the five cases, Head Start and LEA staff reported that benefits and/or outcomes of successful transitions included utilizing the child-level information that Head Start puts

together to better meet children's needs. In addition, in two of the five cases, Head Start and LEA staff reported that a successful transition to kindergarten means that Head Start and kindergarten teachers communicate openly and often about the transition process and kindergarten teachers know enough about children entering kindergarten to help them transition smoothly and meet their needs. Fewer participants across the cases mentioned specific teacher or staff related outcomes or benefits of transition-related efforts, compared with family and child outcomes. **Table 8** highlights the broad themes that emerged from participants' definition of a successful transition and perceived outcomes for teachers and staff, along with illustrative quotes.

Table 8. Illustrative Quotes about Perceived Outcomes for Teachers and Staff

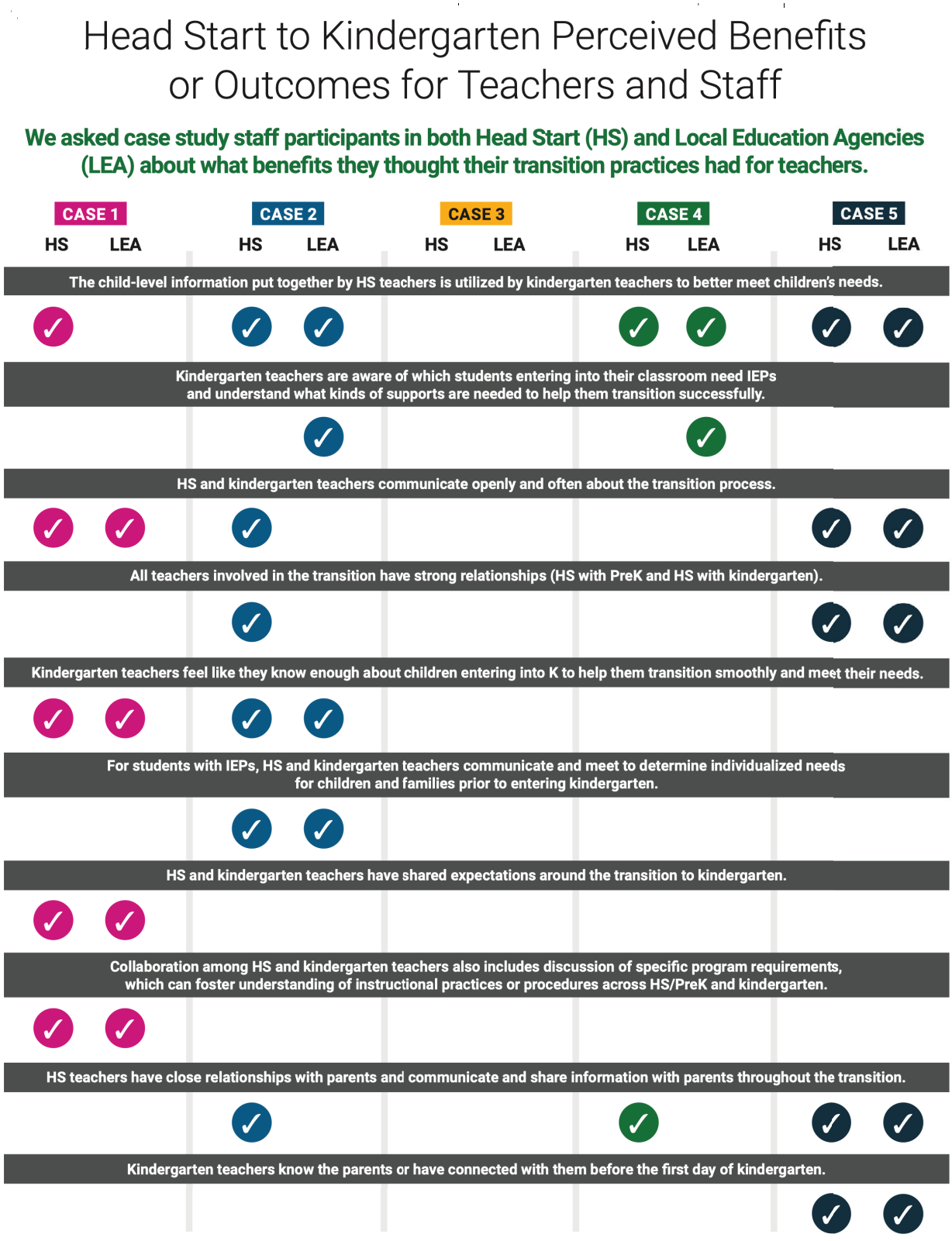
A successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for teachers and staff meant…	Illustrative quotes
A strong collaboration and communication system across teachers and center/school-level staff–both within preschool and between preschool and with kindergarten and other elementary school staff. (Cases 1, 2) Therefore, Head Start and kindergarten teachers communicate openly and often about the transition process AND… …all teachers involved in the transition have strong relationships (Head Start with pre-k and Head Start with K) AND… …for students with IEPs, Head Start and kindergarten teachers communicate and meet to determine individualized needs for children and families prior to entering kindergarten.	• "So, I would say a healthy transition would be strong communication and collaboration between four-year-old preschool teachers and administration and then the elementary teachers; making sure they understand what each person, each professional, does for the students." (LEA Administrator, Case 1) • "I think the teachers also, we want them to feel that we have a safe and supportive collaboration with all of the staff here, and that there's a lot of working together to move that forward. So that you know what's needed at each of the grades as they move forward." (LEA-b Principal, Case 2)

A successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for teachers and staff meant…	Illustrative quotes
Being familiar with and having an understanding of the expectations for each system. This includes familiarity with what children need to be ready for kindergarten. (Cases 1, 2) Collaboration among Head Start and kindergarten teachers also includes discussion of specific program requirements, which can foster understanding of instructional practices or procedures on both sides AND… …Head Start and kindergarten teachers have shared expectations around the transition to kindergarten. “It's keeping that open communication, so they [kindergarten teachers] know what’s required from us, and then us taking maybe just a little bit bigger steps to get them [children] ready.” (Head Start onsite Manager/Coordinator, Case 1)	• “I think our Head Start teachers, understanding what’s needed for the child to be ready to enter kindergarten, and then for the [kindergarten] teachers to be aware of, you know, what is our process, what are the transitions?” (Head Start Director, Case 2)

A successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for teachers and staff meant…	Illustrative quotes
Head Start shares relevant and timely information and data with elementary schools and the data and information are used to support successful transitions and tailoring of children/family needs. (Cases 1, 2, and 5) Therefore, the child-level information put together by Head Start teachers is utilized by kindergarten teachers to better meet children's needs AND… …kindergarten teachers are aware of which students entering into their classroom need IEPs and understand what kinds of supports are needed to help them transition successfully AND… …kindergarten teachers feel like they know enough about the children to help them transition smoothly and meet their needs.	• "We're connecting those preschool teachers with the kindergarten teachers and having formal, you know, meetings where they can collaborate and talk about…expectations, unique student needs...family needs, things that they might want to see in a transition report for each student." (LEA Administrator/Director, Case 1) • "Just so the [kindergarten] teachers know what resources are available, but how they can support the child and then support the parent in that transition. And then at the end of the year, knowing what to do with the data and the important things that we need to make sure that we communicate with the district and the kindergarten teachers if we know which elementary school the children are going to." (Head Start Director, Case 2) • "Having some prior knowledge of the families…At least knowing the families a little bit or having connected with them a little bit before. And it definitely helps when we have some info about our kiddos before they come in. And talking to teachers so that we have information about the kiddos before they come in." (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 5)
There are staff at multiple levels involved in supporting transitions. (Case 5)	• "It can't just be on the kindergarten teacher. It's got to be the principal at that elementary school who's engaging with the Head Start providers, and particularly the program directors." (Head Start Director, Case 5)
Head Start and LEA teachers and staff have strong relationships and communication strategies with families. (Case 3, 4, and 5) Therefore, Head Start Teachers have close relationships with parents and communicate and share information with parents throughout the transition AND… …kindergarten teachers know the parents or have connected with them before the first day of kindergarten.	• "[Staff] communicating along the way with families around how everything is intertwined in building a successful transition, that that's the ultimate goal. So, everything with health, with nutrition, with emotional support, everything takes part in building a stronger transition." (Head Start Coordinator/Manager, Case 4) • "[Children and their families] already feel connected [to staff], or like past families that we've already had, there's just already that connection. So, I think just those relationships are so important to have for a smooth transition." (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 5)

Table 9 summarizes the perceived benefits and/or outcomes of a successful transition for teachers and staff across each of the cases and broken out by Head Start and LEA. Head Start and LEA staff in three of the five cases talked about Head Start and kindergarten teachers open and regular communication as a perceived benefit and/or outcome of successful transitions. Staff in Cases 1 and 5 had more alignment in perceived benefits and outcomes for teachers and staff compared with the other cases.

Table 9. Perceived Benefits or Outcomes for Teachers and Staff



Degree of Alignment in Perspectives of Definition of Transition Success

Participants were more likely to define transition success and/or benefits and outcomes in terms of children and families than in terms of teachers and staff. However, themes of collaboration, coordination, and information sharing were mentioned as important components of transition success across all cases. As noted above, there were some indications of misalignment in Head Start and LEA perspectives—specifically around differing perspectives of what it means to be kindergarten ready.

For those who defined a successful transition in terms of kindergarten readiness, there were some indications of misalignment between how Head Start staff and LEA staff defined what it means to be ready for kindergarten. Compared to LEA staff, Head Start staff more often talked about readiness in terms of children having social-emotional skills that will enable them to learn academic skills. LEA staff, on the other hand, often acknowledged the importance of social-emotional skills, but were more likely to define and emphasize readiness in terms of children having specific academic skills.

For example, Head Start staff in Case 1 talked about the benefits of children being socially and behaviorally ready for kindergarten because of their transition-related practices and strategies. For example, one of the Head Start teachers stated:

KEY FINDING

Head Start staff were more likely than LEA staff to talk about children's kindergarten readiness in terms of social-emotional skills that facilitate the ability to learn academic skills.

"For me, you know, relationships, social-emotional learning holds equal weight, if not more weight than the academic piece of it for me…For me, it's more important to have a student who can network, can locate information, rather than just have it all in their head, but they don't have the abilities to get it out comfortably to their teacher, or to their neighbor. So, that's the big piece for me." (Head Start Teacher, Case 1)

The LEA staff (especially kindergarten teachers), on the other hand, were more apt to talk about whether children were ready academically for kindergarten. While both kindergarten teachers said that it was important to focus transition strategies and practices to support children's social-emotional learning (SEL) readiness, kindergarten teachers wished for more focus on academic readiness. For example, one kindergarten teacher said:

> *"You know I'm supposed to have the kids reading at a level D in [Name of curriculum] by the time they leave kindergarten. And when I get kids that come into kindergarten and they don't know any letters or any sounds, or very few, it's really hard to impossible to get them to the level I'm supposed to have them…I am not saying that I think that's okay because I don't. Right now, in kindergarten*

I'm teaching what I taught in first grade when I first started teaching. And I don't—I'm like we all learn to read, I don't understand why we're pushing so hard, but they get labeled right away as at risk if they're not—if they don't know enough letter sounds…because we have to give standardized tests. So, I guess for some of those things just for readiness to help so they're not going to be labeled at risk, if they would know more, you know, like a number of letter sounds, and letters, and skills like that." (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 1)

Among participants, there was more alignment in their perceptions of child outcomes, particularly the benefit from gaining familiarity with the environment and, thus, feeling more comfortable and less anxious during the transition to kindergarten.

KEY FINDING

Participants demonstrated more alignment in their perceptions of child and family outcomes than teacher outcomes. In particular, participants emphasized children and families gaining familiarity with the kindergarten classroom and elementary school environment and, thus, feeling more comfortable and less anxious during the transition.

In other cases, perspectives on the definition of kindergarten readiness were more aligned across the two systems. For example, both Head Start and elementary staff defined transition success in terms of being both academically and social-emotionally ready for kindergarten in Case 3. One Head Start teacher in Case 3, for instance, described a child showing growth through the preschool year to have the social and academic skills needed to succeed in kindergarten. While this teacher emphasized both skills, they indicated more academic related outcomes, suggesting that a child's portfolio should show that the child knows, "…how to write his first or last name, know the shape and color pattern." Another Head Start teacher in Case 3 said that a successful transition to kindergarten is, "to help them prepare and know basic stuff before moving on to elementary school...like knowing ABCs, recognize the letters I sounds...and recognize their numbers, shape, and colors, and position words." LEA Kindergarten Teacher 1 defined it as the child having the basic social and academic skills as they enter kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers in Case 3 also defined transition success as children having both the social and academic skills they need as they enter kindergarten. For example, one kindergarten teacher said:

"To me, it means sending students with just the basic skills to function inside the kindergarten classroom, that being the ability to walk in line, the ability to raise their hand and wait for a moment or two, a lot of the social aspects of sitting with peers for a story. And then in the academic sense, it's really helpful when students can at least write their name and identify the letters in their name. But ideally, coming in with at least the knowledge, if not the sound of all 26 letters is

super helpful. But at the bare minimum, the letters in the name are a really great start." (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 3)

In cases with co-located classrooms, staff perceived that co-location helped foster these more positive outcomes. In other words, having continuity in relationships between Head Start and kindergarten could ease the transition experience through continued engagement with familiar people, rather than needing to become acquainted with an entirely new staff. The continuity of relationships among parents and staff across the systems was perceived as a positive outcome of transition strategies and practices driven by co-location.

KEY FINDING

Both Head Start and LEA staff perceived that co-location of Head Start and kindergarten classrooms helped foster more positive transition outcomes.

Both Head Start and LEA staff agreed that, to be successful, a transition from Head Start to kindergarten means that children and families feel safe, comfortable, and welcomed in both systems and that parents get to know the kindergarten and elementary school setting to help achieve this.

Misalignment in Standards and Expectations Between Head Start and Kindergarten

As noted above, while there were indications of misalignment in definitions of kindergarten readiness, staff across all cases perceived that these challenges stemmed from having to work under different system expectations for learning. Case study participants talked openly about the challenges with aligning learning standards because Head Start learning standards are more focused on social-emotional skills and kindergarten learning standards are more heavily focused on academic skills. Perceptions of these different systems and expectations were strongly evident across cases.

Case Example

How Misalignment Between Standards Drove Different Perspectives and Approaches

Case 4's Head Start Center Director and kindergarten teacher highlighted perspectives from each of their systems that illustrate a disconnect in teaching approaches based on the standards they each are required to meet. Head Start classrooms lean heavily on play-based learning—what the Center Director described as an *"organic kind of learning where they learn by play, and they learn by things they talk about."* Kindergarten classrooms need to abide by learning standards that don't incorporate or leave much time for play. The kindergarten teacher admitted, "We don't do a lot of play based. It's a lot more rigorous."

From the Head Start perspective, the 'rigor' referred to by the kindergarten teacher came in the form of classroom activities like worksheets, which the Center Director believed 4-year-olds *were "a little young for…at Head Start, we try to stay away from worksheets."* From the Head Start perspective, kindergarten teachers' focus on strengthening skills through worksheet completion can feel like they don't value the role and skill of Head Start teachers in constructing rich learning environments. From the kindergarten perspective, teachers are simply responding to the standards they must meet, *"We're very different models of teaching…unfortunately, I don't have control over this."*

In Case 4, people in both systems acknowledged the need for a bridge between approaches. According to the kindergarten teacher, the systems were *"missing that middle ground piece,"* which they acknowledged as *"no fault to anybody because everyone's doing what they're supposed to do, but…it's a big gap between the two."* And according to the Center Director*, "[the transition] would flow so much better…if we had the same curriculum."* This dynamic in Case 4 demonstrates that, even when you have more aligned perspectives—in this case, the acknowledgement of the gap in curricula and expectations on both sides and need for middle-ground—higher-level influences in policy, regulation, and administration can impede bridge building.

Because of the differing standards, some LEA staff perceived that what is taught in Head Start and other preschool programs was too "easy" or not rigorous enough to align with kindergarten readiness expectations. This is partly due to Head Start and kindergarten teachers having different perspectives on what is developmentally

appropriate at different ages. Head Start professionals more often talked about preschool being a time when they can nurture children and respond to their needs. But kindergarten and elementary staff spoke more often about how kindergarten is more academically focused and, therefore, there is more pressure to ensure their students are meeting the standards. Most states have set standards for all elementary grade levels from kindergarten on up. Elementary standards are aligned with students meeting benchmarks on state standardized tests, which typically begin in grade 3. State standardized tests are considered high stakes because districts and schools are held accountable for making sure students meet proficiency benchmark levels on these tests. This system of meeting academic targets so as to meet these benchmarks, creates stress on each grade level. Therefore, these differences in standards, expectations, and teaching practices sometimes resulted in tensions about what teachers should be focusing on during the transition period. For example, one kindergarten teacher perceived that even bringing up the differences between the learning expectations can be a challenge, stating:

> *"Because sometimes if we bring up things in front of the preschool teachers...they might take it personally, and we don't want them to take it personally; It's just factual. It's just, like, this is just the fact, this is what's happening, you know, on our end of it. This is what's happening, what we're seeing." (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 1)*

While the kindergarten teachers in this case mentioned the differences in perspectives of what it means to be kindergarten ready, the preschool teachers were more apt to point out that the disconnect is at the systems level and not at the teacher level. For example, one preschool teacher mentioned, *"the dissonance between preschool and kindergarten, you know, that comes from lawmakers, and federal standards, and state standards."* Similarly, the school principal in this case also struggled with what should be taught in preschool and the lack of alignment with what is needed to be kindergarten ready, expressing:

> *"I feel like that's a really hard balance; it is. Because we want to make sure that we're doing age-appropriate things and not—it needs to be somewhat rigorous, but at the same time they're three and four and they're just learning how to be around friends and how to play together and getting exposure to different types of vocabulary, but I think those are the discussions that we continually need to have that's just going to strengthen kindergarten readiness." (Principal, Case 1)*

We also found differing perspectives from kindergarten teachers on what exactly happens in Head Start because of a lack of understanding of the Head Start learning model. For example, kindergarten teachers in Case 2 revealed that they would like to have a better understanding of what is happening at the Head Start level. One teacher stated:

"I guess it would probably just be more helpful for me to know what maybe they expect, what they're doing to prepare, and maybe how I can help keep that the same for a little bit until we ease into it. So, maybe just more understanding of what their program looks like, and how different it is from mine. So, I feel like maybe that would open my eyes a little bit to, oh, okay, I have to start doing things a little differently. Because to me, it feels like, oh, okay, we're doing pretty standard kindergarten stuff. But maybe if their program is a lot different, or they didn't have a lot of structure, maybe what that looks like would be a little different starting kindergarten off their first transition. Yeah, so maybe just not enough knowledge of their program." (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 2)

Differing Perspectives of the Head Start Community

Not only were there differing perspectives about readiness and the expectations for learning, but we heard different perspectives about what the other system represents. The misalignment of learning standards spilled into misperceptions of the Head Start community in general. This was described in interviews as a stigma related to how Head Start families and children are perceived. For example, one Head Start Manager/Coordinator in Case 2 reported that some district staff perceive Head Start as "daycare," without an academic focus. Many Head Start families and children experience stigma, according to the Case 2 Director of Head Start, expressing:

"I think Head Start–I think elementary schools have a preconceived notion that Head Start is daycare, and that it's not really school, and that we don't work on important skills. And so, I think that needs to change in society as a whole so that more school districts will see the value in Head Start, because when they see the value, we'll have more buy-in." (Head Start Manager/Coordinator, Case 2)

This stigma was evident in Case 1 in how kindergarten teachers talked about Head Start families. For example, one kindergarten teacher in Case 1 said this about Head Start children when asked how she defines a successful transition to kindergarten:

"The social skills are the, I think, probably some of the real difficult skills to actually teach to them [children] because, you know, they're a product of their environment at home and so for some of them school and home are very different, but I guess having socially acceptable skills would be something that I would be looking for." (Kindergarten Teacher Case 1)

Head Start and school staff in Case 1 are trying to improve kindergarten teachers' perspectives of Head Start families and they mentioned actively working on changing kindergarten teacher mindsets. For example, a Head Start Manager/Coordinator and an LEA Administrator began hosting Head Start/preschool and kindergarten teacher meetings to talk about the ways in which the different systems operate and how Head

Start is supporting children's SEL and academic development. They also began discussions about what it means to be kindergarten ready from a developmental perspective and how they can better align the systems.

Furthermore, in some instances, LEA staff felt as though the "strictness" of Head Start standards and protocols made it *"more difficult for the pre-k teachers to teach and do what makes sense"* (LEA Staff Case 3). This makes collaboration difficult, as one LEA staff member in Case 3 said:

> *"I just know they [Head Start] have just so many protocols, and so many ways, and very strict ways on how they do things that it makes, sometimes, collaboration difficult…I have a hard time collaborating with the pre-k teachers because my ideas may not fall in line with all the structures and protocols that Head Start has. So, it's a roundabout way of saying collaboration is kind of tough..." (LEA Staff, Case 3)*

In addition to understanding the Head Start program (and standards, perceptions of what Head Start staff do and their roles and responsibilities) another challenge emerged in one case. One Head Start teacher in Case 2 said that some district staff were unaware of who she is or what Head Start does, saying:

> *"I know this kind of sounds horrible, but a big issue this year is just, like, the district doesn't quite understand what Head Start does, and it kind of seems like they keep thinking I'm like an aide or something. […] So, a lot of them don't want to listen to me when I do try to start a conversation. They're just, they don't have time. A couple of them just realized last week that I was a Head Start teacher." (Head Start Teacher, Case 2)*

Case Example

Limited LEA Familiarity with Head Start Resulted in Head Start Staff Feeling Less Than Equals

In Case 5, the limited familiarity with Head Start often led to Head Start staff feeling like they and their program were less of a priority to the K-12 system and elementary schools. For example, participants in Case 5 mentioned a history of preschool teachers feeling undervalued and as separate from the larger K-12 education system. The Head Start Director in Case 5 described it as a systemic issue, saying, *"the early childhood field has not been seen as important, I will say, and that preschool teachers are not being valued as regular teachers too."* The Community Partner in Case 5 also perceived this as a systemic issue on the LEA side, stating, "K-12, they're not trained in social emotional. They don't necessarily understand it. They don't necessarily listen to ECE, right?"

Uneven Family Engagement Practices

Furthermore, Head Start staff often perceived that the differences in Head Start and elementary school models resulted in differences in levels of family engagement. As one Head Start Manager and coordinator said, *"I think Head Start is a very different model than the public schools, and we really kind of hold our families near and dear. That's not necessarily what happens in the public schools."* (Head Start Manager/Coordinator, Case 3)

Similarly, in Case 4, Head Start staff described providing extensive supports to families throughout the transition, but the amount of support that Head Start staff provides to families was perceived differently among certain Head Start staff members. One Head Start Coordinator/Manager worried that parents would struggle once they transitioned to kindergarten because the LEA would not provide the same level of supports as Head Start, sharing:

> *"We really, really, really support families, sometimes too much...They have to be able to function without you, hand over hand with them. But some families need that. So, knowing that they have to do things next year without us, it's a fine line because you want to support them and do all that but knowing that we're so unique. We're so comprehensive, that's not going to happen at the kindergarten level. Not because they don't want to. They just can't. They just can't. People care, but there's only so much time and only so much you can do. Like I said, it's*

a great thing to have that comprehensive stuff and that hand over hand, but next year, it's not going to happen that way. It won't." (Head Start Coordinator/Manager, Case 4)

Furthermore, Head Start parents talked about how they wished that kindergarten teachers could provide the same level of support to families as Head Start staff. One parent explained:

> *"I think for the kindergarten side, that the kindergarten teachers and the student teachers. I wish they would be...connected with the parents, like how the Head Start teachers and the Head Start coworkers are. Like you establish that relationship at the beginning. You communicate with them throughout the week. Kindergarten, you know, other grades, they're not like that. And I understand, you know, it's a bigger class. They have a lot more responsibilities. They've got a lot of work, but I feel like reach out to the parents, whether it's through Dojo* [a *messaging app], whether it's through a call, whether it's through an email will help a lot of parents, especially a lot of first-time parents as well." (Parent Focus Group Participant).*

While the high level of support in Head Start is highly appreciated, parents and Head Start staff perceived that the level of support does not continue once children transition into kindergarten.

Differing Perspectives on the Utility of Information Shared

Lastly, in three of the five cases (Cases 1, 3, and 5) participants talked about differing perspectives on the utility of information shared between Head Start and kindergarten. For example, while Head Start/preschool teachers in Case 1 share a packet of data with kindergarten teachers, the LEA staff perceived that the Head Start assessment data is not relevant for kindergarten. For example, one district director said:

> *"So [Head Start Assessment] is unique in what it measures. It doesn't measure things that a kindergarten teacher would necessarily need to know to plan or prepare for them incoming. For example, it will give them three images like a bar of soap, a broom, and a car, and the student has to pick the thing that does not belong. The teacher wouldn't necessarily find that relevant, you know? They wouldn't use that data, but we do share it with them." (District Director, Case 1)*

Similarly, In Case 3, Head Start teachers and staff develop a child portfolio for each of the children which they share with parents who can then share with their child's kindergarten teacher. However, one Head Start Manager/Coordinator in Case 3 noted kindergarten teachers' reactions to the child portfolio is "mixed." Similarly, another Head Start staff member noted that in the past, some kindergarten teachers were hesitant to use the portfolio and preferred to get their own information, adding that sometimes the

portfolio *“ends up being more just a keepsake for the family [rather] than a tool to help the child transition.”* None of the LEA staff or teachers in this case remarked on the portfolio.

In Case 5, while kindergarten teachers said they appreciated the exchange of assessment data and information with Head Start teachers, they wished for different kinds of information. Head Start pulls together assessment data and information for kindergarten teachers that is focused primarily on children’s strengths. However, kindergarten teachers expressed wanting to know more about how children were doing social-emotionally, which requires different types of information on each child. For example, one kindergarten teacher explained:

> *“I care more about like family stuff, like how the kid is just on their own, how they are, what kind of stuff they like, have challenges with, what kind of stuff they do really well. So, I feel like I just want to get to know the child as a child, not as like how much they can speak, and what they know, and counting, and like all these things I don't really care so much about. They share, like, the whole, like, where they stand in the [Case 5 State ECE Assessment]. And like they kind of share where they started the year and where they ended the year. But that's kind of all they are able to like go through and then share like positives about the students. And I don’t think it's on them. It's just like what they’re told to do.” (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 5)*

It is important to note that not all information sharing across the cases was perceived as unhelpful. However, both Head Start and LEA staff talked about wanting to have more discussions about alignment of standards, expectations, assessments, and data, across the two systems.

Chapter 4: Policies to Support Transitions



Key Takeaways

The following are key findings on one important strategy—policies—to support transitions to kindergarten (**RQ1**), participants' perspectives on those policies, and how they influence transition practices and other strategies:

- Case study findings showed that many transition practices and strategies are not written into explicit documentation, but that informal policies or expectations exist.
- In cases with strong partnerships, there was less guidance in the form of written policies and more reliance on relationships.
- While there are federal requirements around some policies (e.g., the creation of MOUs between Head Start and LEAs), findings suggest there is nobody holding them accountable to ensure they exist or that they drive practices.
- MOUs were a common way to document cross-system decisions and policy. However, in some locales, only the highest-level administrators could speak to their contents in detail.

Introduction

Policies are the explicit documentation of organizational regulations, standards, agreements, procedures, and guidance around supporting transitions to kindergarten. These may include structures and processes around administrative practices (e.g., records transfers), routine schedule adjustments (e.g., shortened days at the start of kindergarten), process guidance for staff engaged in activities (e.g., teacher meetings), and established communication documents shared with parents around transition expectations. The alignment of policies across systems is the extent to which Head Start and K-12 systems have explicit, substantive policies about transitions that complement each other. These may include, for example, MOUs and interagency agreements, data sharing agreements, and explicit accountability for discrete activities that go hand in hand in providing a particular experience for children and families.

Recorded agreement on policies is a way to encourage consistency in practice across often complex administrative structures. However, written documentation is not enough

to ensure execution—let alone that all actors are positively engaged in the work. Organizational culture and buy-in, as well as specific practices that are well-aligned to a policy's goals, are crucial to ensuring that a policy is carried out as intended. We discuss these dimensions of policy implementation in **Chapter 5**. In this chapter, we limit our discussion to the within- and across-system policies—whether explicitly documented or not—that participants identified as laying the groundwork for their transition approaches and practices, the degree of policy alignment we saw across Head Start and K-12 systems, and links to existing knowledge of kindergarten transition policies.

Laws and Regulations Influencing Kindergarten Transitions & Cross-System Alignment

Head Start programs have several transition-related requirements stated in the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 and the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016), which guide Head Start programming. Grantees are required to establish family and community collaborations, engage in appropriate learning environment activities, and provide additional transition services for children with an individualized education plan (IEP). Additionally, Head Start programs must collaborate and communicate with LEAs and other entities that manage publicly funded preschool programs in the same service area as the Head Start grantee. The MOUs must establish—in part—"communications and parent outreach for smooth transitions to kindergarten" (Head Start Act, 2007).

For K-12 districts receiving Title I funds, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) includes specific transition requirements. One such requirement states that districts must enter into agreements with Head Start programs (and, if feasible, other ECE programs) from which their students transition in order to collaborate on improving the transition experience for children and families. ESSA allows LEAs and school leaders to use Title II funds to provide joint professional development between public school teachers and ECE educators. ESSA also requires LEAs that receive federal funds for the support of English learners to coordinate activities and share relevant data with Head Start and other ECE providers. Individual states submit 'plans' for ESSA requirement implementation—which can include these transition components—as accountability roadmaps to the U.S. Department of Education. An HS2K Project scan of state ESSA plans, however, discovered highly variable inclusion and discussion of ESSA's kindergarten transition requirements. This may be, in part, because the templates provided by the department did not include a section on transitions. Less than half of states included incentive language for kindergarten transition activities in their plans and only a handful had explicit activity requirements. While most states reference Head Start in their plans, just a fraction reference Head Start in relation to the kindergarten transition. These plans exemplify the distributed nature of power in the K-

12 system across local, state, and federal governments. Individual LEA attention to ESSA's requirements depends heavily on individual state's interpretation and emphasis on federal requirements.

Distinct from ESSA plans, nearly half of all states in the United States have requirements related to the kindergarten transition, including policies requiring written transition plans, providing transition programs to children, developing clear expectations about kindergarten readiness, aligning standards and assessments, and requiring collaborative teams to articulate and oversee implementation of transition practices.

Review of the Knowledge Base on Kindergarten Transition Policies

There is little research on district-level or school-level policies regarding kindergarten transitions. There is also little research on the distinction between policies that are "on the books" and how those policies are implemented in practice. Although the research is limited, some studies have shown that policies promoting cross-system partnerships can improve reciprocal communication across systems, a critical factor for successful transitions (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Purtell et al., 2019; Little, 2020). In addition, research conducted by the HS2K Project team on MOUs found that while some agreements between Head Start and LEAs included information specific to kindergarten transitions, they often had broader purposes and lacked detailed descriptions about how the two systems would align transition supports (Cook et al., 2022). When details were included, they often focused on three requirements aligned with federal policies: 1) creating cross-system communication channels, 2) developing family collaboration and involvement practices, and 3) transferring, sharing, and obtaining student records and data.

Beyond this research, we know little about how policies guide transition supports or cross-system collaboration to support children, families, and staff through the transition. In particular, more research is needed on:

How policy implementation is associated with teacher, family, child outcomes;

- How policies support bridging two systems (ECE and K-12);
- Facilitators of policy implementation regarding transitions;
- Evidence of the conditions under which enacted policies focused on kindergarten transitions are implemented effectively in ways that create positive impacts for children and families.

The findings based on case study evidence (described below) help fill in some of these gaps.

Findings: Transition-Related Policies

Shared Transition-Specific Policy Documents

Cases shared a variety of documents they considered to be "policy" that supported cross-system collaboration or within-system communication to families (see **Table 1** for documents shared, some of which would be considered policies). These included MOUs, handbooks, and crosswalks between Head Start and kindergarten performance standards. However, there were minimal cross-system policies that explicitly referenced the support of kindergarten transitions. Organizational policies on transitions across the five cases tended to be unwritten, derived directly from higher level state and federal policies, or embedded in more general policy documents like MOUs. Below, we discuss where participants across all five cases identified kindergarten transition policies that support the strategies and practices they employed.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Mentioned in all 5 Cases

As stated above, MOUs or interagency agreements are required documents in both Head Start and K-12 systems receiving Title I funds. They are one of the few places we heard about explicit documentation of transition-related policy. Overall, both Head Start and LEA administrators across cases described their MOUs as outlining their general partnerships, which are not always transition-specific. In Case 1, for example, the MOU explicitly lays out how Head Start will share data and what types of data they will share with the LEA for children who will be transitioning into kindergarten within the district. The MOU also states that Case 1 LEA, in exchange for receiving data from Head Start, will meet with Head Start at least yearly to discuss kindergarten expectations. In addition, in Case 3, one key component of their MOU was that Head Start administrators should focus on practices and strategies to support school success for children. Regarding transitions, the Case 3 MOU largely focused on Head Start and LEA coordination on transition-related activities. It also called for Head Start to notify the LEA of children who will need transition services and for Head Start to participate in meetings or activities when a child transitions. The LEA superintendent in Case 2 similarly described their MOU as laying out the *"financial supports that each organization provides"* across crucial resources for co-location such as preschool classroom space, and teaching staff. Other non-transition-specific focus areas mentioned by participants included supporting children with disabilities (Case 3, Case 4), IEP management (Case 3), purchasing supplies (Case 2), and transportation (Case 3). Still, as the Case 2 Head Start Director observed, all of MOU content "*has to do with transitions, but it's not focused on transitions."*

The most commonly cited transition-specific focus within MOUs was data and information sharing (all Cases), inclusive of a more intensive teacher-to-teacher data exchange in Case 5. Case 3's MOU, for instance, established the guidelines on data exchanges around the partnership's shared curriculum and assessment. The LEA utilized Head Start assessment data in their reporting to the state, and Head Start was able to request kindergarten assessment data of former Head Start children as part of their own continuous quality improvement. It is important to note, though, that data flowing from LEAs back to Head Start programs was only mentioned in this one Case. Within Case 5, participants described the MOUs (that the regional education agency held with both Head Start and participating school districts) as outlining the terms of a teacher-to-teacher data exchange, which we describe in more detail in **Chapter 5** and **Chapter 6**. In Cases 1, 2, and 4, there was more general discussion of information and data sharing.

Case Example

MOU Purpose and Content

Of the MOUs we received and analyzed, Case 4's was unique in that it contained summaries of a wide array of agreed upon transition strategies and practices. For example, the MOU stated that both parties agreed to ease the kindergarten transition by:

- Making kindergarten teachers available for transition-team meetings.
- Inviting/encouraging Head Start staff to attend open houses at the elementary school.
- Allowing LEA staff to observe prospective kindergarten students while they are in Head Start.
- Inviting Head Start caregivers to LEA transition trainings, workshops, and events.
- Providing Head Start children with disabilities, and their families, a chance to visit kindergarten classrooms before the beginning of the school year.
- Having Head Start share information about its transitioning students with the LEA.
- Scheduling meetings between LEA and Head Start staffs to specifically discuss the transition of students with disabilities.
- Having Head Start schedule classroom visits or meetings with kindergarten teachers.
- Conducting joint planning meetings between Head Start and kindergarten teachers.

Despite several administrators in both systems across cases citing MOUs as a positive practice in defining their partnerships (one person in Case 1, three in Case 2, two in Case 3, one in Case 4, and three in Case 5), few participants actually mentioned the MOU as driving or supporting transition-related work across all of the cases.

It is important to note that, in many cases, systems-level administrators were the only individuals who could speak in detail about these documents. For example, building-level administrators often did not know about any MOUs (Case 5) or could only speak to them in broad strokes (Case 1, Case 2, Case 3). When prompted to describe their

MOUs, Case 2's Head Start Center Director stated, *"I don't really know the specifics."* Case 1's principal stated, *"I can't speak to that."* And Case 3's Head Start Center Director simply said, *"I don't know,"* while Case 3's elementary principal admitted that they had never seen the document. This indicates that MOUs may not always explicitly drive policy and practice vertically within systems. In fact, the LEA superintendent in Case 2, when prompted to think about transition policies, pondered aloud whether it would be a good idea to bring some *"codification"* to their transition strategy by pushing it *"beyond the MOU into a policy stage"* with some further documentation. In some instances, this further complementary documentation did exist. For example, according to a Case 2 Head Start Manager/Coordinator, *"We have a whole documentation that shows every school and their transition plans that are unique to each school and the programs feeding into it that we follow."* These formal transition plans outlined activities like kindergarten roundup and classroom visits in more detail. In a similar vein, Case 1 shared a "family handbook" and a crosswalk of Head Start to kindergarten performance standards, both used in transition planning and communication amongst Head Start staff. Also, Case 3 shared a Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit.

However, we know that the content and detail of MOUs can vary widely, and that kindergarten transition strategies and practices are not always included (Cook et al., 2022). Based on participants' accounts, this appears to be true across our cases. In some cases, MOUs seemed to be more high-level, less detailed agreements. In others, MOUs were described as more detailed and foundational to the partnership. The Case 3 Head Start Program Director, when prompted to speak about their partnership's MOU, shared how they used the MOU process to make their conversations *"more concrete."* For example, this Head Start staff member stated:

> *"It [the MOU] helped facilitate that conversation where we could reach an agreement where, you know, we're going to actually do something together that'll help us both out. It's not just something that's going to go sit on a shelf now."*

According to this participant, *"You can meet a requirement by checking a box or you can really try to meet the intent of the requirement."* Partners can *"sign some superficial MOU and get it off their desk[s]"* to meet their system's regulatory requirements, *"but it's not going to mean very much."* In the case of their partnership, the participant said they felt like they did more than 'check the box.'

Ultimately, the variability across partnerships regarding the importance of MOUs is likely related in part to the broad nature of federal MOU requirements and the lack of parallel accountability mechanisms within each system. Because MOU requirements are so high level (Cook et al., 2022), both systems can meet the MOU requirement—or as our participant said, "check the box"—without engaging in any of the deeper cross-system coordination and alignment activities that we heard about in this multi-case study. We

know that while all Head Start programs must meet the same performance standards regardless of location, LEAs exist in meaningfully different regulatory environments across states. The aforementioned HS2K Project state policy scan found that although there are federal kindergarten transition requirements for ESSA—including the MOU requirement—it did not appear in some state ESSA plans. Further, there are no mechanisms for collecting and analyzing MOUs or determining whether they are "compliant" with regulations. Together, these conditions leave it up to individual state and district administrators to see value in the MOU development process, invest resources, and fully apply any agreed-upon policies.

This study did not evaluate the relationship between MOU content and the implementation of the 4Ps at each level of the systems. We do not know whether MOUs were a necessary or advantageous precursor to any or all of the transition activities described in this report. However, we did hear evidence that MOU development can be a positive step forward in negotiating and defining a partnership at the highest level of system administration.

Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)

Mentioned in all 5 Cases

Head Start participants across levels and across cases identified compliance with state and federal requirements as a key driver behind program-level transition policies (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016). For example, Case 5 Head Start's Director simply stated, *"It's mostly compliance driven."* When prompted to identify influential kindergarten transition policies or requirements at the state and federal levels shaping their transition strategies and practices, Head Start staff across all five cases spoke about the HSPPS, specifically its transition, family engagement, and special education screening guidelines. Staff talked about their own transition policies as directly embedded in the HSPPS requirements, linking its guidelines to how Head Start staff approach the transition both within their own system and across the two systems. When prompted to think about the origin of their program's transition practices, Case 2's Head Start Director stated, *"It's in the performance standards…we follow the Head Start Performance Standards pretty strictly…I would just say the [HSPPS] policy would be whatever we do."* Case 5's Head Start Manager/Coordinator similarly expressed that, *"The ones that we do…that's all based off of Head Start Performance Standards."* Furthermore, according to Case 3's Head Start Manager/Coordinators, their program's *"Standard Operating Procedures"* have *"transition pieces"* of the HSPPS *"scattered throughout."*

While it was clear that HSPPS drove the work happening in Head Start, it is a one-sided policy as opposed to a cross-system effort. No LEA staff indicated knowledge of the HSPPS, let alone mentioned it as guiding their transition approaches. However, in Case

2, which has co-located centers operating a blended model with state pre-k, the superintendent in LEA-a and elementary principal in LEA-b identified a Head Start screening policy as a key Head Start regulation they have had to implement given that the district partially operated the blended Head Start / state pre-k classrooms. The LEAs in Cases 1, 2, and 3, in addition to having Head Start-hired teachers, have LEA-hired preschool teachers running classrooms containing Head Start children. This suggests that this model of co-location *may* lead to closer collaborations and alignment of policies across systems. When prompted to think about what might aid effective policy implementation, the Case 2 LEA-a Superintendent credited their partnership with Head Start as a resource:

> *"I think that's where Head Start is helping us quite a bit too, I think, because it was through our partnership initially with Head Start that we were able to receive some training and some guidance and even some templates that we could utilize in agreements and MOUs. That's a pretty basic example. But between the early learning programs within the district and the programs and work that they're doing, and what's being done in Head Start, I think that there's a pretty good mutual assistance that's going on as we train each other, if you will. Perhaps a bit more from the district on the kindergarten side of things, and perhaps more from Head Start on the early learning side of things." (Superintendent, Case 2 LEA-a)*

Head Start Standard Operating Procedures

Mentioned in Case 2 and Case 3

Head Start staff in Case 3 referred to its program's "Standard Operating Procedures" (SOP) manual as the written guidance for all aspects of Head Start programming related to educational practice, family engagement strategies and activities, and transition approaches. One Case 3 Head Start Manager/Coordinator noted that the SOP has transition pieces woven throughout—such as guidance about preparing a child's portfolio, educational plans, and family engagement events. It also contains a written take-home resource for families about what to expect in kindergarten, as well as guidance on timelines and processes for some concrete transition practices like moving children from tables to desks and from classroom lunches to cafeteria lunches in the year prior to kindergarten entry.

Head Start staff in Case 2 described how coordinators and education managers collaborated to establish Head Start standards based upon *"talking points around transitions,"* inclusive of both the transition from Early Head Start to Head Start and the transition from Head Start to kindergarten. The team determined and disseminated a list of key developmental skills for each developmental period to help guide teachers and families through transition periods. The talking points are agency wide and provide a common language amongst Head Start staff regarding children's developmental goals.

State Early Learning Standards or State Pre-K Program Standards and Assessments

Mentioned in Cases 1, 2, and 5

LEA staff, including LEA preschool, elementary, and district-level staff across three of the five cases mentioned their state's early learning standards. LEA participants talked about these early learning standards as being a guide for academic teaching and learning in preschool, including defining developmental milestones, which help guide what is taught in preschool to ensure children are on track for kindergarten. LEA staff in Case 5 mentioned assessments as a requirement of their state early learning standards.

Head Start staff in Cases 1 and 5 were the only Head Start staff to mention state early learning standards or state pre-k standards. In Case 1, the blended Head Start/state pre-k program must follow the state's early learning standards, which includes daily schedule requirements, learning outcomes, and family engagement outcomes that differ or are distinct from the HSPPS. According to the Case 1 Head Start Manager/Coordinator, their program has written guidelines detailing:

> *"3- and 4-year-old kindergarten readiness goals for them that align with all of the state standards learning outcomes. And so, anything from managing classroom rules and routines, being able to transition [between activities], being able to approach basic rules and new situations. So again, it doesn't just look at [whether] they know their letters. It's really looking at the child overall." (Head Start Manager/Coordinator, Case 1)*

State-Based Transition and Alignment Programming Guidance

Mentioned in Case 5 Only

Both Head Start and regional education agency staff in Case 5 referenced state government agency initiatives focused on building out transition and cross-system alignment activities using the state's universal pre-k program as the focus point. Two of the three regional education agency staff we interviewed stated that they thought these initiatives influenced state legislative policy around transitions and alignment, and that this state-level leadership has led to more participation and interest from districts and elementary schools.

Case Example

How State Requirements and Initiatives Influence Transitions

Case 5's Head Start staff indicated that the HSPPS were more detailed and stringent than state pre-k standards in many ways, and—thus—why they design all blended programming to meet the HSPPS for all children in their care (see **Figure 6**). However, the agency must still meet all state early learning standards, including kindergarten transition components. The agency implements a required state pre-k assessment for all children in their care, described by a regional education agency staff member as an *"unfunded mandate."* Every participant in Case 5 mentioned this state-required assessment, and it is the only state policy that participants mentioned that differed or was 'more stringent' than Head Start standards. The regional education agency staff channeled state and philanthropic grants into training and coaching for both Head Start/pre-k and kindergarten teaching staff on understanding and conducting the assessment. Both administrative and teaching staff said that the assessment is well-aligned with the HSPPS.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Mentioned in Case 4 Only

Only one person in one Case talked about ESSA. The Head Start Executive Director in Case 4 said that when ESSA passed:

> *"I sent it to the superintendent [and] said, 'Hey, there's new regulations. Now you are required as well as us to have [an MOU], and here's a draft. What do you think? Can we meet?' And that may have been the real start of the relationship [getting] better."*

As this quote indicates, ESSA was used as a lever to begin to codify one of the partnerships. Despite the policy having transition-related guidelines, it is telling that it was not widely mentioned across all the cases as a policy driving transition practices or strategies.

Degree of Alignment among Policies Across the Systems

Overall, participants in our five cases reported responding to and creating very similar policy environments. On the Head Start side, administrators across all cases pointed to the Head Start Performance Standards as the primary driver of transition policy and practice at the program-, center-, and classroom levels. On the LEA side, only one

administrator (Case 5) pointed to a specific federal or state transition requirement. However, both Head Start *and* LEA administrators in three cases cited state early learning standards as influencing their approach to kindergarten transitions. In these scenarios, the LEAs administered state pre-k; in addition, in two of those three LEAs, we interviewed had a dedicated early learning administrator. The differences in how consistent policies are implemented across Head Start programs and across LEAs is likely reflective of the two systems' divergent governing structures. In particular, Head Start's federal-to-local governance seems to lead to more consistent kindergarten transition practices and strategies across states while K-12's more decentralized governance leaves more kindergarten transition policymaking power in the hands of state and local leaders. Three themes emerged from this core policy context, as discussed below: (1) alignment between Head Start and other pre-k programs emerged as the most frequently discussed area of policy alignment, (2) there are not many mandates or incentives from the government to support cross-system alignment, and (3) existing partnerships were heavily dependent on relationships.

KEY FINDING

Participants did not describe many mandates or incentives from the federal and state governments to support cross-system alignment. Case study partnerships were heavily dependent on self-initiated relationships. Overall, alignment between Head Start and pre-k programs emerged as the most frequently discussed area of policy alignment.

Head Start to State Pre-K Alignment Activities Were the Most Prevalent Policy Alignment Examples.

While there is some federal kindergarten transition policy alignment across both Head Start and K-12 systems (e.g., the parallel MOU requirements), we saw little evidence that federal K-12 transition policy directly influenced LEA administrators' decisions about kindergarten transition policy and practice. In fact, as we heard in Case 4, the Head Start Executive Director reported that *they* initiated the MOU development process required by the newly passed reauthorization of ESSA—not an LEA administrator. What evidence we did see around the influence of higher level policy shows LEA administrators mostly focused on horizontal alignment between state-funded pre-k programming and Head Start (see **Figure 8**). This could very well be why we heard about state early learning standards as the sole higher level policies influencing LEA transition approaches. Ultimately, this is where most of the cross-system alignment work across cases occurred. Horizontal alignment between state-funded pre-k and its influence on Head Start to *kindergarten* policy alignment is under-explored in research and practice. However, participants across our cases suggested that a more unified ECE landscape across curricula, assessments, and perspectives on child development could simplify transitions to kindergarten by reducing complexity.

There is a Lack of Government Mandates, Initiatives, and Incentives to Support Transitions and Cross-System Alignment

Even on the Head Start side, with its federal-to-local governance and emphasis on the HSPPS, there was considerable variation in how individual Head Start programs and administrators interpreted and implemented HSPPS requirements. As we described previously, some cases codified transitions policies in procedural documents while others reported having no specific written documentation outside of broad-stroke MOUs. Even those MOUs demonstrated variability in detail and content.

KEY FINDING

There is a lack of government mandates, initiatives, and incentives to support transitions and cross-system alignment.

Case 5 was unique among cases with regard to the level of state systems policy influencing kindergarten transition approaches. While participants in other cases did discuss state early learning standards, they did not describe the same level of state intervention in cross-system alignment that appeared to influence all 4Ps within the Head Start program, school district, and regional education agency in Case 5.

Case Example

Systematizing Practices

While we heard about practices like data sharing in all cases (a requirement for both the Head Start and K-12 systems), Case 5 stands out as having the most systematized implementation with dedicated professional development, funding, and administrator-organized activities like teacher meetings (see **Chapter 5** for more detail). Participants in Case 5 cited these specific and dedicated resources as key to obtaining buy-in and thorough implementation. In this case, state and philanthropic grants provided for staff time and other resources that allowed administrators to set up structures that relieved individual teachers and family engagement staff of the sole implementation burden. When these structures are absent, the burden for that work falls upon local, bottom-up alignment initiatives that require considerable effort amongst community partners and already stretched thin education staff on both sides. We heard about some of those more grassroots initiatives amongst community organizations in Case 5, and we heard about more organic, teacher- and staff-led practices based on individual initiative and creativity in the absence of higher-level systems structures. Participants across cases and systems stated that neither Head Start nor K-12 funding streams contained line items to fund kindergarten transitions work specifically.

Adding to these Case 5 resources were state government mandates and standards, like the required state pre-k assessment (see **Chapter 5** for more detail). Participants at each level pointed to the required assessment and its integration into broader state P-3 alignment initiatives as the core of both Head Start to state pre-k alignment and Head Start to kindergarten transition work. And Head Start and regional education agency administrators specifically pointed to state initiatives like the required assessment as crucial to increasing buy-in from LEAs in the state for collaborative efforts. The Head Start Director in particular emphasized their own efforts related to and strong belief in aligning kindergarten readiness standards across the systems through the adoption of the state ECE assessment. Related, regional education agency staff believed that pre-pandemic, a state-based P-3 alignment program that brought together staff on both sides once per month was key in building cross-system relationships. One regional education agency administrator shared their belief that the program influenced other policymaking and legislation at the state-level, and that state leadership was important to securing participation from elementary schools (as opposed to local initiatives).

Partnerships Relied More Heavily on Relationships than Transition Policies

Relationships between people in different roles both *within* and *across* systems are crucial to supporting children and families through the kindergarten transition. Research

suggests that strong relationships help create communication and trust—both important for aligning perspectives (Ehrlich et al., 2021). Across case studies, stronger relationships appeared where there was more clarity around partnership roles and responsibilities, which were sometimes clarified through structures set within systems that required, incentivized, and/or facilitated particular relationships. Relationships also developed organically amongst administrators, teachers, and family support staff, particularly those in co-located settings. While we did see instances of systems-level policies like MOUs and data exchanges providing structures for relationships to develop, these instances were less common. Across cases, kindergarten transition activities and alignment work relied most heavily on individual administrators, teachers, and/or family service staff taking it upon themselves to initiate connections and activities. In some cases, relationships between administrators were strongest. In others, relationships between teaching staff were strongest.

Participants across all five cases reported on the lack of aligned standards, curricula, and assessments. Because transition strategies relied so heavily on relationships, individual perspectives of Head Start and LEA staff about standards, curricula, and assessments drove how they thought about cross-system alignment and their role in supporting transitions.

KEY FINDING

Case Study partnerships relied more heavily on relationships than transition policies and structures.

Chapter 5: Transition Practices, Strategies, and Professional Supports



Key Takeaways

The following are key findings on the transition-related strategies and practices Head Start and elementary schools implemented to support children as they transition from Head Start to kindergarten as well as the content, quality, and quantity of these strategies and practices (**RQ 1**):

- Practices are similar to what we know from other research—most focused on children and families, and within-system practices are more common than practices that connect the two systems together.
- Even in cases with existing cross-system partnerships, there was little evidence of cross-system or *joint* professional supports, whereby Head Start and kindergarten staff had common time together focused on supporting kindergarten transitions.
- Head Start and LEA practices seemed more aligned when the programs co-located in the same building, offering ease of both formal and informal communication that could occur prior to, during, and after the kindergarten transition.

Introduction

In this chapter we describe practices, strategies, and professional supports used by Head Start programs and LEAs to support the transition to kindergarten (**RQ 1**), as shared by staff across all cases and levels of the system in the interviews. We asked participants to tell us about practices, strategies, and professional supports that Head Start and LEAs/elementary schools initiated independently to support transitions, as well as those they conducted jointly. Below we describe those practices and strategies using the Office of Head Start/Office of Child Care National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning's (NCECDTL) taxonomy for types of transition practices (Office of Head Start, 2020). When possible, we describe the content and quantity of those practices, and any perceived quality that case study participants offered. We share findings from the perspectives of the multiple staff involved in these

efforts and how they were experienced by families. We then describe where there was, or was not, alignment across Head Start and LEAs on practices and professional supports.

Transition-Related Practices and Strategies

The HS2K theory of change posits that Head Start and kindergarten (elementary schools and LEAs) function individually as their own systems and also work together using joint coordinated strategies to support the transition to kindergarten (Ehrlich et al., 2021). In addition, families, educators, and community partners within and across Head Start and kindergarten can also initiate transition strategies. To organize the types of transition practices and strategies reported from the cases in this study, we categorize them by Head Start practices, LEA practices, and joint practices within the NCECDTL taxonomy for transition practices (OHS, 2020). This includes practices that have points of connection between: 1) family-program/school, 2) child-program/school, 3) Head Start- school, and 4) community-program/school.

Defining Practices

Practices are defined as concrete activities designed to support children/families during the transition to kindergarten. Transition practices can be enacted by Head Start or kindergarten separately or jointly through coordinated transition practices. They can also occur at various levels within/across each system (e.g., Head Start Grantee/LEA leadership, Head Start directors/principals, teachers, and staff).

The **alignment of practices** is the extent to which Head Start and kindergarten sides (both across schools/centers within systems and across systems) implement practices that complement each other, work in alignment, or involve communication within and between the two systems.

By organizing practices in this chapter using the NCECDTL taxonomy for transition practices (2019), we are able to surface the connections between practices.

- Family-school connections serve to increase family collaboration and engagement with the school during the transition process. This occurs by providing information to families including how to register for programming as well as develop an avenue for delivery of child resources such as home visits and dental care.
- The goals of the child-school connections are to introduce and make children familiar with the kindergarten spaces, the school environment, expectations, and teachers. It also enables elementary educators to become familiar with children.
- Connections between Head Start program and school manifest through direct communication about the children, ensuring that schools learn about the children and Head Start is aware of upcoming school expectations for their current students.
- Finally, the relationship between the school and community operates to ensure families experience continuity throughout the transition process by offering multiple communication strategies to families who may not receive information directly.

Table 10 provides an overview of examples of practices reported by participants that fit within these categories. The columns represent how the practices can be categorized using the NCECDTL taxonomy and the rows represent whether the practices were

reported by participants as Head Start practices, LEA practices, or joint practices. Then we describe the practices in more detail with examples described by participants.

Table 10. Examples of Transition Practices and Strategies Reported by Participants

Head Start, LEA, or Joint	Family-Program/School	Child-Program/School	Head Start-School	Community-Program/School
Head Start Individually	• Provided information and resources for families. • Provided kindergarten registration support. • Provided materials to support kindergarten readiness. • Conducted home visits. • Provided transition-related events. • Held teacher-parent meetings. • Connected families to resources and supports (e.g., dental, vision, food).	• Conducted home visits. • Provided specific supports for children with special needs. • Provided kindergarten readiness and preparation activities while at Head Start.	• Shared information about children with kindergarten teachers.	

Head Start, LEA, or Joint	Family-Program/School	Child-Program/School	Head Start-School	Community-Program/ School
LEA Individually	• Kindergarten teachers shared information with families including skills and expectations needed. • Schools invited families and children to meet, visit school, (some virtual and some in person). • Schools held events.	• Kindergarten teachers sent letters and postcards to children. • Schools invited families and children to meet, visit school (some virtual and some in person).		• LEA worked with local library to hold kindergarten readiness events.
Head Start & LEA Jointly	• Head Start staff and elementary/ LEA staff jointly made videos for children and families. • Jointly planned events such as family literacy or math nights. • Head Start actively promoted LEA-sponsored events with Head Start families.	• Head Start and elementary school arranged a visit for children to visit kindergarten classrooms and meet teachers. • Head Start staff and elementary/LEA staff jointly made videos for children and families.	• Two-way communication (formal and informal) initiated between Head Start and kindergarten teachers about rising kindergarten children's needs and kindergarten expectations. • Teachers observed each other's classrooms. • Aligned curricula and/or assessments.	• Both sides planned events that included the local library. • Both sides participated in a community health fair to share information about the transition and registration.

Note: Categories drawn from the NCECDTL. More information at: https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/educator-practices-support-successful-transitions-kindergarten.

Family- and Child-to-Program/School Practices

Prior correlational research using large-scale nationally representative datasets suggests that practices involving Parent-School connections (e.g., parent orientations, teacher call or letter) are associated with children's overall positive adjustment to kindergarten, as well as increased achievement in reading and math (Cook & Coley, 2017; Schulting et al., 2005). In particular, practices that foster relationship building may be most effective, including those between program/school staff and parents (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Kindergarten teachers may use one approach, but they more often rely upon multiple practices to engage families (Early et al., 2001; Pianta et al., 2001). However, they typically engage in fewer practices than their Head Start and other ECE peers where practitioners are more likely to use multiple transition practices. Most common among them were discussing transitions with parents (99%), providing parents with information about the school their child will attend (98%), sending home informational letters about the transition to kindergarten (97%), teaching parents child advocacy skills (89%), and scheduling a parent visit to their child's next school (82%; Abry et al., 2018).

Here we provide examples of the ways in which staff in our five cases implemented practices that involved outreach to parents and their children—first by looking at Head Start-specific practices, then by LEA-specific practices, and finally at joint practices.

Head Start Activities with Families and Children

Head Start programs in our cases were likely to implement practices that directly engaged their families and children. These fell into several types of categories. One set of activities represents what Ehrlich Loewe et al. (2022) call "information sharing" activities: providing both information and resources for services that were intended to support children's readiness for kindergarten as well as parents' readiness.

Through connections with community resources, Head Start programs provided information to families both directly and indirectly. Three of the five Head Start programs provided information and resources to families about the kindergarten transition (Cases 1, 3, and 4), such as information packets with a skills checklist, booklets about what to expect in kindergarten, and information on how to prepare their child. One parent expressed:

> *"I feel pretty prepared. I feel pretty confident in how much knowledge that the Head Start has given me to help him transition through, so I'm ready. We have all summer. They gave us that packet to help us with activities to help prepare him more in his readiness. So, I'm pretty ready." (Focus Group Parent, Case 3)*

Programs also provided parents with direct support with the kindergarten registration process, including sending paperwork home, ensuring documentation requirements were met, reminding parents of deadlines, and helping them complete the forms (Cases 4 and 5). Two Head Start programs also ensured that families received continuity of care for their children—something that may decline as children transition from one service to the next. This showed up through connections to medical resources and services in the community (Cases 2 and 3) and food and transportation assistance (Case 2). This is consistent with other work on transitions that has suggested that continuity and alignment of services and experiences for children and families is important (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Patton & Wang, 2012; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

In many cases, resources were provided to children and families simultaneously. Thus, while NCECDTL considers them distinct items in theory, in practice, we tend to observe their co-occurrence. Because of this, we jointly describe transition efforts for children and their families.

In addition to concrete resources like letters home, programs also built children and their families' capacities for transitioning between Head Start and kindergarten. This occurred through materials and activities to support social-emotional and academic readiness for kindergarten. For example, one program built up children's emotional regulation skills by implementing Second Step (an SEL program) into their Head Start (and other preschool program) curriculum as well as in kindergarten (Case 2). Participants articulated how these skills were a key component of kindergarten readiness. In addition to social-emotional supports, many of the programs addressed kindergarten readiness by implementing activities and curricula designed to prepare the children for kindergarten (Cases 1, 2, 3, and 4). They also shared kindergarten readiness activities with family members to encourage implementation at home. Activities included skill-building packets (e.g., letter tracing, matching, numbers, name writing), ideas for interactive parent-child activities (e.g., movement break videos; Case 2), and summer engagement activities. In addition to the activities, some programs also provided families with materials such as crayons and drawing paper or subscriptions for web-based learning activities (Case 1).

Home visits were central to preparing families for the transition to kindergarten for Head Start programs. Home visits are part of the Head Start service delivery model and are conducted throughout the child's preschool experience. Therefore, it was not surprising that all Head Start programs in our sample conducted home visits. All programs reported that the home visits addressed kindergarten transition topics. However, it should be noted that Head Start home visitors address a myriad of topics over the course of the child's time in the program. Across all five cases, family services staff conducted the visits. The frequency of visits ranged from two visits for one case (Case

1) to three or four visits for another (Case 3). For Case 1, the family services worker conducted home visits at the beginning of the preschool year school year to set family-desired goals and subsequently did another round of visits toward the end of the preschool year to discuss the transition to kindergarten (Case 1). For Case 3, the home visits with the family advocate were held throughout the preschool year to address expectations, routines, and kindergarten preparedness.

Head Start-initiated, transition-related events also included face-to-face, and individual teacher-parent meetings. Face-to-face family events organized by Head Start programs included gatherings specifically focused on sharing transition information as well as those that more broadly addressed family interests (Cases 2, 4). Four of the five Head Start programs organized such events for families (Cases 2, 3, 4, 5). One program also leveraged the virtual space by hosting family "Zoom" nights to share what the children were learning, how the children were progressing, and provide alternative ways and times for families to engage with the program. Three other programs offered more concrete feedback on the children's academic readiness for kindergarten. For example, at two programs, parents met with the Head Start teacher to go over the child's state early childhood assessment results. At another program, the final parent-teacher conference of the year was reserved for discussing the child's formal progress with the parents, preparing them for what to expect in kindergarten, and providing guidance on how families can support their child's preparation over the summer.

In addition to the many singular events, Head Start teachers engaged in ongoing communication with parents. These frequent check-ins between the Head Start teachers and parents laid the foundation for strong parent-teacher relationships. This was particularly true if the check-ins informed parents about how their child was learning in Head Start and whether their child was on track for kindergarten. For example, in Case 5, the one parent we interviewed expressed her appreciation for these communications because the updates informed her of what skills indicated kindergarten readiness and her child's ability in relation to those skills, saying, "The support they [Head Start teachers] give is that he can hold the pencil, he can hold the scissors, they start scribbling and coloring, so they are ready to leave preschool for kindergarten. It's a lot of support and help for me." They mentioned that being aware of the skills their child was developing was reassuring in knowing their child was prepared for the kindergarten classroom.

Head Start teachers were not the only ones to engage with families. Parents also spoke about meeting with Head Start managers/coordinators regularly in Case 1, which was easier because these staff were located within the elementary school. In addition, Head Start and elementary school staff consciously worked to integrate Head Start and other preschool families into the larger school community. These invitations to schoolwide

events helped reinforce for families that preschool, and thus they themselves, were part of the larger school community.

Head Start staff also connected families to community resources and services to assist with transition-related needs. Head Start's comprehensive services include a wide array of educational, health, and social service supports designed to support a child's holistic growth and development and ensure children are ready to learn. More targeted supports were provided to address child-specific needs or to connect families to resources and services. For example, two Head Start programs connected families to resources and services in the community to meet transition-related needs, such as dental, vision, and medical check-ups (Cases 2 and 3) and food and transportation assistance (Case 2).

Within the classroom, Head Start staff used class time to orient children to expectations and routines of kindergarten. As the durable practices that help us understand how the world operates, routines can be relied upon to provide guidance on how we are supposed to act in different situations. In the case of the Head Start, two programs implemented routines to orient children to the expectations of kindergarten (Cases 1 and 2), and one used routines to teach expected behaviors (Case 2). Adjustments in routines came from linking existing pre-k practices to future kindergarten practices (e.g., shifting from nap time to quiet time, changing from family-style lunch to joining a school lunch line). In addition to routine modifications, one program used Creative Curriculum's module focused on getting ready for kindergarten and an SEL curriculum to prepare children. Transition activities did not conclude at the end of the school year. Rather, to provide reassurance during the first week of the new school year, some Head Start staff met their former students at their new bus stops or elementary schools to ease the transition (Case 4).

LEA Activities with Families and Children

For LEAs to engage families and children as they bridge the Head Start-kindergarten transition requires them to conduct outreach with families prior to having their children in their classrooms. Yet even with this limitation, staff on the LEA/kindergarten side of the transition engaged directly with children and families to support the kindergarten transition experience. Many of these outreach efforts occurred during the summer prior to kindergarten. These school-based efforts included sending newsletters (Cases 1 and 2), checklists (Case 4), and welcome letters and postcards (Case 1). The aim of these communication strategies was twofold: 1) to provide a positive first experience with the LEA and 2) to inform families of both what to expect in kindergarten and the types of behaviors and skills their children would need to have mastered prior to arriving (e.g., toilet trained, or eating lunch independently).

In addition to asynchronous outreach efforts, kindergarten teachers and their school leaders offered in-person transition activities as a way to visit the school and meet school staff. One LEA hosted transition meetings with the principal and kindergarten teachers (Case 4), while another hosted virtual conversations with incoming families throughout the year (Case 5). One parent even mentioned communication with an LEA administrator in Case 1. Yet another offered in-person events at the public library and virtual information sessions throughout the school year to orient parents to kindergarten and provide online resources to encourage readiness (Case 3).

That same LEA (Case 3) included a one-week delayed start in their school calendar in order to hold “mini-sessions” where families and children could meet their kindergarten teachers and the teachers could learn about the child’s strengths and needs. The school used this “pre-kindergarten” week to practice the routines of kindergarten on an abbreviated schedule, enabling children to attend class, visit the library, eat in the cafeteria, and generally learn school routines and procedures with the support of a buddy and without the pressure of a full day. Other schools implemented a variation on this theme, with kindergarten “roundups” held prior to the first day of school that enabled new students to meet the kindergarten teacher, become familiar with the classroom, practice routines, and obtain information or materials (Cases1, 2, and 3). Roundups occurred for varying lengths of time and time periods with some held in the evenings and others occurring piecemeal over the course of three days. Variations of the kindergarten roundup included family school tours (Case 1), open houses (Case 2), open night (Case 4), and orientation night (Case 5) where families were invited to meet staff and teachers and tour the classroom and building.

The act of registering for school was also seen as a time to assist with the transition. Many schools held group events to assist with registration and some used the roundups or other evening family sessions as a time to explain registration to families.

While most of the transition efforts came from the LEA and their teachers, one school integrated their family center into the transition process. With parallel responsibilities to Head Start Family Advocates, these family support staff contacted caretakers directly and provided supports in English and Spanish (Case 5). They also maintained connections with the Spanish-speaking families by hosting orientation and family nights for children in all grades.

Joint Head Start-LEA Activities with Families and Children

In addition to running independent transition activities, many Head Start and elementary school staff created joint programming. While such programming mirrored the existing efforts, the partnered nature of the programming aimed to help families bridge environmental and instructional differences in Head Start and kindergarten settings.

Three programs co-located within the school took advantage of the structure to have preschool children visit kindergarten classrooms during the day (Cases 1, 2, 4), while another used the proximity to visit other school resources like the cafeteria and library (Case 4). Along with providing familiarity, staff worked to create a united front by developing introductory videos during the COVID-19 pandemic (Case 2, 4) that provided a virtual first look at kindergarten, or planned family literacy (Case 1) and math nights (Case 3).

Other examples of Head Start-LEA coordination involved mutual participation in a community health fair to share information and support transition activities, such as registration (Case 4) and active promotion and participation in LEA-sponsored family events by Head Start staff (Case 3).

Head Start Program-to-School Practices

These described practices focus largely on those where Head Start and elementary school staff share information with each other which serves to strengthen their relationships with one another. The HS2K Project's review of the knowledge base suggests that these cross-system collaboration activities (those that truly are "joint") are less commonly observed in support of kindergarten transitions (Ehrlich et al., 2021; Purtell et al., 2019). This is likely because these collaborative practices are more time consuming. However, they also are more likely to focus on overall alignment and continuity of experiences for children and families than less collaborative systems (Einarsdottir et al., 2008; Hartley et al., 2012; Petriwskyj, 2013).

These across-system practices can be driven by one side of the system (either Head Start *or* LEAs) or they can be jointly planned and implemented. In our cases, Head Start programs were more likely to be the originators of cross-system communication than the LEAs, but examples typically included both parties. This finding is promising because the literature consistently finds that children whose pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers learned from each other—whether through sharing data or descriptions about their students' individual development and needs—are more likely to show more advanced social skills, greater growth in academic scores, and smoother adjustment into kindergarten (Ahtola et al., 2011; Cook & Coley, 2017; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Head Start Activities

Thus far, we have discussed how transition activities have been directed towards families and their children. Head Start staff also supported their students' kindergarten transitions through communication with the upcoming kindergarten teacher. In order to prepare for each child's unique experiences and knowledge, Head Start teachers shared about a child's strengths, needs, abilities, and family context (Cases 1, 3, 4, and

5). Head Start staff also led efforts to develop transition plans to support children with special needs so they would be in place by the time the child attended kindergarten. How Head Start teachers delivered this information varied by program. Case 4 used a standardized "transition form" directed at kindergarten teachers to convey information about the child's IEP status, home context, and overall kindergarten readiness. Another school shared similar information in a less formal way, including information about a child's strengths, any concerns or specialized needs, and other unique characteristics or concerns from parents (Case 1). To provide information about the child and build a relationship with kindergarten teachers, another program provided families with a portfolio of the child's accomplishments including observation-based assessments, a report card with activities to build skills, child work samples (artwork, handwriting), other examples of the child's growth and development, and a child's IEP (if applicable), along with a letter to the kindergarten teacher (Case 3). The expectation was that the portfolio would be reviewed by the parents and then the family would deliver the information to the school, enabling families to learn about their child's accomplishments and provide information for the schools. The process had the added benefit of encouraging families to engage with the school prior to their child attending.

LEA Activities

LEA's primary efforts occurred through their work directly with families or in collaboration with the Head Start programs. Some transition efforts seemed more seamless by the co-location of Head Start classrooms in the school. In fact, such inclusion in its own right could be considered a transition practice as families, children, and Head Start and school staff are all in close physical proximity, creating school familiarity simply through co-location. For example, with Case 3, the LEA made their training sessions available for the Head Start staff involved in the collaboration and also gave all Head Start staff access to its full range of virtual professional development activities.

Joint Activities

There were several examples of two-way activities across systems that promoted bi-directional learning on how to support children and families throughout the kindergarten transition. One set focused on communicating expectations and student data, while the other set worked to align practices across the Head Start-kindergarten divide.

Kindergarten staff and Head Start teachers co-located in the same building were more likely to engage in **regular information exchanges**. Such exchanges discussed plans for student supports (Cases 1, 2, and 3). These exchanges could occur in formal meetings like the ones that Case 1 held between the Head Start Onsite Supervisor, LEA Early Childhood Director, and all preschool and kindergarten teachers. During these

meetings, teachers discussed the expectations for kindergarten and how they currently aligned with the expectations for preschool and how they could be better aligned. In a similar manner, another Head Start-LEA partnership held joint meetings to discuss skills children have worked on, assessment results, supports needed, as well as identifying children who may need extra support for the transition (Case 2, LEA-b). Additionally, some transition activities included non-teaching staff. For example, the Head Start and district nurses collaborated to make sure that the health-related services follow the families and children across the Head Start-kindergarten transition (Case 1).

In addition to these more direct communications, staff also communicated via assessment data. **Assessment-based data sharing** occurred in three Head Start-LEA partnerships. In one partnership, Head Start teachers prepared a “data exchange” portfolio about each child to share with the kindergarten teacher that included state assessment results and strength-based comments from the teacher and parent (Case 5). These portfolios were shared in person between the Head Start and kindergarten teachers. The regional education agency in this Case incentivized these voluntary meetings by coordinating convenient times for them to occur and paying a stipend to participating teachers. While teachers and administrators found these data exchange meetings useful and thought that they produced actionable information about the children, they also reported that they occurred too late in the year. Due to scheduling constraints, the meetings did not occur until later in the fall (October-November), well after the start of the school year. Thus, these meetings were not as helpful as they could have been prior to the start of the school year.

Some partnerships offered less involved data sharing procedures—primarily making sure that the new schools and kindergarten teachers received information about children’s developmental screening scores, health records, vision and hearing screenings, and special needs identification as well as data from assessments (Case 2). Another case site took a more bi-directional approach to data sharing by first gathering the developmental profiles of each Head Start child, sharing it with the kindergarten teacher, and then sharing back school math and literacy screening test results to the Head Start program so they learn how their students are performing.

In conjunction with data sharing, some case sites worked jointly to communicate schooling practices across grade levels. One case did this by conducting **shared observations** of each other’s classrooms across the grade levels. Another site extended this by engaging in classroom observations (pre-COVID), then discussing children’s academic and social growth and continuing to have informal exchanges about individual children once kindergarten began.

Another form of joint Head Start program-to-school practices focused on efforts to **align curricula and/or assessments**. Discussed in-depth in an earlier chapter, we repeat

them here to highlight their joint nature. First, four of the five Head Start-LEA partnerships intentionally aligned aspects of curricula, assessments, or instructional strategies between Head Start and kindergarten to support children's academic and social-emotional learning (Cases 1, 2, 3, and 4). Second, three Head Start-LEA partnerships used common tools or frameworks to support children's social-emotional learning and development. These tools, implemented across grade levels, created common expectations, language, and guidelines for children throughout their Head Start and kindergarten education. One did this through a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework (Case 1); another partnership used Second Step, a common SEL curriculum (Case 2); while a third relied upon the Conscious Discipline curriculum (Case 4). Lastly, two Head Start-LEA partnerships used common curricula. One partnership engaged in intentional cross-teacher collaboration on curriculum and instructional strategies between Head Start and kindergarten classroom (Case 3). Another partnership used a common literacy and handwriting program in both Head Start and kindergarten classrooms (Case 4).

Cases also worked together to support children with specific needs. While legally obligated to provide services, partnerships accomplished this in different ways. In Cases 2 and 3, the Head Start Disabilities Services Coordinator led these efforts and directly engaged elementary school staff. Case 5 did something similar with the Disabilities Services Coordinator, not only working with the school staff but also coordinating with the elementary school disabilities department to attend IEP meetings. Case 1 leveraged more of a team-based approach, including the Disabilities Services Coordinator, onsite supervisor, family service worker, and preschool teachers holistically. And Case 4 assigned specific activities to support students with disabilities. These activities included meetings between Head Start and LEA staff focused solely on the transitions of these students and classroom visits designed specifically for children with disabilities and their families. In addition to school-based supports, one partnership also offered home-based services to support the child's development and preparation for kindergarten (Case 3).

Community-to-Program/School Practices

In our prior review of the literature, there was surprisingly limited information on Community-School practices that support the Head Start to kindergarten transition. Even key informants, some of whom were from community organizations themselves, neglected to address how community organizations or intermediary partners played a role in supporting the kindergarten transition (Ehrlich et al., 2021). However, in our case study protocols, we sought to ask explicitly about these partnerships. More description of them exists in **Chapter 6**, but we highlight a couple of examples here where those relationships led to the implementation of particular practices that reached children and families.

While some of the engagement was between either Head Start or the LEA and the community partners, most engagement included all three entities. For example, Head Start, the LEA, and community partners planned events at a local library (Case 4) or at a community health fair (Case 3). In one case, Head Start independently engaged with community partners and hosted county-wide roundtables every three months (Case 2). By encouraging community partners and schools to attend, these roundtables could include them in the discussions about kindergarten transitions, among other topics. In Case 1, the school and Head Start partnered with different community and service organizations in the area and families were able to take advantage of services whether they were in Head Start or once they are in kindergarten.

Summary of Practices and Strategies

Head Start to kindergarten transitions received a lot of attention from the Head Start programs, schools, the community, and the people staffing these organizations. Such efforts aligned with federal requirements to ensure quality preschool to kindergarten transitions for children. Both the HSPPS and ESSA have mandates regarding communicating with families about the kindergarten transition. They also both require the entity under their jurisdiction to coordinate with their cross-system counterpart. Thus, the HSPPS require Head Start programs to collaborate with LEAs, and ESSA mandates LEAs receiving Title I funds establish procedures for cross-sector collaboration, professional development, and data sharing with Head Start programs. Despite these policy requirements, questions remained regarding the extent to which each system—and the two systems together—implement practices and strategies that engage families, each other, and community partners.

Head Start programs implemented multiple practices and strategies to support children's transition to kindergarten and to support families throughout the transition process. Transition-related topics were integrated into Head Start family partnership practices, such as home visits or parent involvement in center-based activities and encouraged family engagement and advocacy during the transition period. Elementary schools and LEAs also used a variety of practices and strategies to support families through the transition by reaching out to them and sharing information. These efforts involved targeted, personal outreach by kindergarten teachers to individual families or individualized meetings, along with broader school-based and LEA-led initiatives that were open to all kindergarten children and families.

Jointly, Head Start and LEA staff engaged in a broad array of transition practices and strategies designed to facilitate the transition for families, children, and staff. Their mutual efforts were largely focused on orienting children and families to the kindergarten setting, meeting kindergarten teachers, sharing information, and organizing events that supported the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Many of these efforts were aided by having Head Start programs co-located in schools. In addition to communicating about the existing transition process, there was initial evidence that some case systems were engaged in practices designed to match expectations about markers of child development and school readiness across the programs to reduce friction points for children and families between the two programs. Some of this occurred through common or aligned curricula, assessments, instructional strategies, and language.

KEY FINDING

Cross system practices were largely focused on orienting children and families to the kindergarten setting, meeting kindergarten teachers, sharing information, and organizing transition events.

Transition-Related Professional Supports

Across cases, only one Head Start-LEA partnership provided professional development and coaching opportunities for teachers in both Head Start and elementary schools (Case 5). Some of the coaching sessions for preschool teachers focused specifically on transitions and discussed the process and practices to support successful transitions to kindergarten.

In the other four cases, we found no evidence of transition-specific professional supports provided to Head Start and LEA staff and no jointly conducted trainings (Cases 1, 2, 3, and 4). In three of these cases, however, professional supports for Head Start and LEA staff did focus on aligning preschool classroom practices (Cases 1, 2, and 4), collaboration among preschool teachers (Case 1), and supporting students with IEPs across Head Start, preschool, and kindergarten settings (Case 4).

Head Start and elementary school staff at one Head Start-LEA partnership (Case 2), received diverse types of training. Although one participant indicated that Head Start-provided professional development and coaching around transitions for LEA teachers, other staff did not confirm this. On the other hand, LEA staff did have specific opportunities for professional development focused on curriculum, assessment, social-emotional learning, and diversity and equity (Case 2).

KEY FINDING

There was no evidence of transition-specific professional supports for Head Start and LEA staff or jointly conducted trainings in four of five Cases.

In another Head Start-LEA partnership, staff did receive common training but did so independently of each other (Case 3). Staff received training in Conscious Discipline®, a comprehensive classroom management program and a social-emotional curriculum used to support behavior management and positive interventions. While all LEA early childhood training and professional development opportunities are open to Head Start staff, the Head Start Director indicated that *"the timing usually doesn't work,"* which is why training tends to happen independently. However, she also said that they try to "coordinate when we can."

Degree of Alignment in Transition Practices and Professional Supports Across the Systems

Head Start and kindergarten programs operated jointly with varying degrees of alignment across practices and professional supports. By "alignment of practices/professional supports," we are referring to the extent to which Head Start and kindergarten implement practices/professional supports (both across schools/centers within systems and across systems) that complement each other, work in tandem, or involve communication within and between the two systems.

Alignment of Practices

We found variation in the degree of alignment in practices and strategies across Cases, ranging from strong alignment to more limited alignment. In theory, strongly aligned systems would have practices that matched or complemented each other across Head Start and kindergarten. In many cases, alignment was incomplete, with some degree of alignment in some approaches but not in others, or with more horizontal alignment between Head Start and LEA-based preschool and less with kindergarten. For example, in Case 1, Head Start and LEA-based (state-funded) preschool exhibited strong alignment on practices and professional supports. On the other hand, Case 3 showed vertical alignment on practices between Head Start and kindergarten. In Case 5, there

were some practices being implemented by both systems, with the support of an intermediary (a regional education agency).

Participants talked about scenarios where there were explicit areas of *mis*alignment. For example, expectations around kindergarten readiness and differences in education standards between Head Start and LEAs were described as promoting practices within each system that may not have matched the practices and expectations in the other system. The lack of direct communication between Head Start and kindergarten staff was also noted as something that got in the way of developing or implementing aligned transition practices. For example, a lack of co-location within the same building led to limited alignment and communication between Head Start and LEA programs. Overall, Head Start and LEA practices seemed more aligned when programs were co-located in the same building, offering ease of both formal and informal communication that could occur prior to, during, and after the kindergarten transition.

KEY FINDING

In theory, strongly aligned systems would have practices that matched or complemented each other across Head Start and kindergarten. In many Cases, alignment was incomplete, with some degree of alignment in some approaches but not in others, or with more horizontal alignment between Head Start and LEA-based preschool and less with kindergarten.

KEY FINDING

Overall, Head Start and LEA practices seemed more aligned when programs were co-located in the same building, offering ease of both formal and informal communication that could occur prior to, during, and after the kindergarten transition.

Alignment of Professional Supports

We found limited alignment of opportunities for professional supports between Head Start and LEA staff, across our Cases. For example, Case 2 exhibited strategic alignment, but the engagement varied between LEA-a and LEA-b.[8] Case 4 also showed an alignment across belief systems, but it did not appear to translate into opportunities to work together with joint professional supports. That said, there were initial efforts to move towards joint professional supports. For example, in Case 5, professional supports were managed by the regional education agency which considered trainings to encompass grades “zero to five”, thus supporting efforts to align Head Start with both school-based preschool and kindergarten.

[8] This could be true in other Cases as well; Case 2 was the only one of our cases that included two LEAs.

Chapter 6: Cross-System Partnerships and Collaboration in Support of Transitions

Key Takeaways

The following are key findings regarding the characteristics of the partnerships and relationships among Head Start programs, LEAs, and other community partners that focused on supporting children and families' transitions from Head Start to kindergarten (**RQ2**):

- Transitions take place within larger partnerships between Head Start and LEAs. Some partnerships were sparked by larger initiatives that brought staff from the two systems together, while others took individual staff initiative.
- Partnerships between Head Start and LEA were formed to join the two systems for the purpose of supporting families and children living in the communities being served and not specifically to help support transitions. However, through these partnerships, the contributions from each of the systems helped to align and support the experiences of children and families as they transition from one system (Head Start) into the other (K-12 elementary school).
- Some partnerships were longstanding, while others began more recently. Overall, we did not find that the length of the cross-system partnership necessarily corresponded with the strength of the partnerships.

Introduction

Thus far, we have shared the experiences of our case study participants in terms of the 4Ps: perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices. However, underlying any effort to create alignment in any of these areas is the need to engage in collaboration and partnership. In this chapter, we explore the ways in which each of our Head Start-LEA cases collaborated and developed their partnership. We consider collaboration and coordination as the mechanisms through which staff in these two systems set up and maintained shared and aligned policies and practices. Underlying these partnerships are individual relationships among staff, the consistency of which is part of what promotes longevity in the partnership.

Positive and collaborative relationships are key to strong partnerships within and across systems (Geiser et al., 2013; Kauerz, 2018, 2019). As described in Ehrlich et al. (2021), there are different levels of collaboration, which may help define the strength of the partnership: C*ooperation* represents the starting point or base level of inter-organizational relationships, with cooperation associated with a lower level of intensity in the relationship between parties, as well as the expectation for reduced effort and input. *Coordination* presents having an instrumental function in which organizations are required to work together via already established mechanisms. *Collaboration* is perceived as a more intensive process that requires closer relationships, connections, and resources—and even a blurring of the boundaries between agencies (Mandell et al., 2017). In one study, most participants identified the development of shared goals, joint dialogue, and a higher level of trust as being the primary indicators of collaborative action or a collaborative relationship.

In this section, we describe the nature of the partnerships across the five cases and include references to similarities and differences across cases and systems in the ways that the partnerships are structured and operationalized to support transitions. It is important to note that one of the criteria for being selected as a case for this study was a pre-existing relationship between Head Start and a local LEA in the community. Therefore, the cases in this study may be further along in their partnerships than in other communities. Nevertheless, this chapter provides valuable insights into these relationships, which can prompt other communities to consider how they develop and operationalize their own partnerships.

Coordination Between Head Start Programs and LEAs to Support Transitions

We asked a series of questions about how staff coordinate to work together, including how often they meet, who meets with whom, and the structure of the meetings. We asked for details about how those meetings help to support children and families' transition from Head Start to kindergarten. We also asked participants to share the origin of the partnership, including when and how the partnership between Head Start programs and the LEAs began. In seeking to understand the level of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among partners in each case, we explored:

- How long the partnerships between Head Start programs and LEAs were in place and what helped to maintain these partnerships.
- The structures partners put in place to support collaboration, such as meeting structure and frequency.
- Who was likely to collaborate with whom—both within systems and across systems.

- How formal (e.g., staff member on site devoted to supporting alignment and transitions, regular meetings set up to support collaboration across the systems) or informal (e.g., staff simply run into or talk to each other more organically to support children and families' transition) interactions occurred among staff at different levels of the system.
- The degree to which partners jointly identified goals—or an overarching vision—around supporting transitions and the nature of those goals.

Origin, Length, and Structure of Head Start-LEA Partnerships

We start with the origin of the partnership, including how long partners have been working together, the impetus for why these partnerships were formed, and the structure of the partnership. In this section, we also describe what each system within our Cases brought to their partnerships. The length of the partnership across our cases varied widely, from approximately 12-15 years (Cases 1 and 3) to newer partnerships that formed in the last three years (Case 2). Two Cases had participants who described having had longstanding formal agreements to partner, but that those partnerships have become more focused and intentional only more recently (Cases 4 and 5). Participants were asked to describe when their partnerships began and how it formed and changed over time.[9]

Examples of External Initiatives Sparking Partnerships

In three of the cases (Cases 2, 4, and 5), intentional partnering began as part of an external initiative focused on supporting broader partnerships, which then brought the systems together. For example, Case 4 participants said that their partnership strengthened significantly about 4 years ago after staff from the Head Start and LEA both attended the same event hosted by the State Department of Education. Coincidentally they sat at the same table together. Similarly, the partnership in Case 2 between Head Start and LEA-a began three years ago when there was an opportunity to participate in a project together, which helped to initiate the relationship. According to the Director of Head Start, the partnership helped institute a "paradigm shift" from LEA-a staff seeing children enrolled in Head Start as "your kids" to "our kids." The LEA-a Superintendent worked collaboratively with the Director of Head Start to create the partnership.

KEY FINDING

In three of the cases (Cases 2, 4, and 5), intentional partnering began as part of an external initiative focused on supporting broader partnerships, which then brought the systems together.

The origin of the partnership in Case 5 was different from Cases 2 and 4. In Case 5, the partnership was bolstered after the

[9] Note that in two of our cases, it was difficult to discern the origin of the partnership due to staff turnover in recent years.

Community Action Agency blended their Head Start and state-funded pre-k programs. The Case 5 partnership also includes an integral intermediary organization—the aforementioned regional education agency—that serves to bridge the systems in part because they have mandates and funding which involve both state-based ECE and K-12 initiatives. The restructuring of ECE in the area and turnover amongst administrative staff prevented the research team from receiving a clear history of the partnership. However, while the new restructuring solidified the partnership, Head Start had co-located classrooms within the partner elementary schools prior to the restructuring.

Examples of Individual Initiative Sparking Partnerships

Not all partnerships came together as a result of external initiatives; some were sparked by individual initiative. Most notably, partnerships were formed because one staff in one system reached out to the other to begin conversations about formally partnering (Cases 1 and 3). Both of these partnerships have been longstanding. For example, in Case 1, the partnership between Head Start and the LEA began close to 15 years ago when the superintendent at the time had the idea to formally partner with Head Start, recognizing that Head Start would benefit children and families in the community because they could provide extra preschool services and supports, and the school district could provide space and additional staff and programming. This former superintendent saw that a partnership with Head Start could be mutually beneficial. The Head Start in the area agreed. For example, the Head Start Director in Case 1 said the partner school district had, *"…a very forward-thinking superintendent at that time, who wanted to do preschool…The superintendent who started this whole thing was very active and very supportive."* While the partnership has always been valued, the school principal said that it has grown over the years, explaining:

KEY FINDING

Not all partnerships came together as a result of external initiatives; some were sparked by individual initiative.

> *"I will tell you, though, it just seems to have grown, and grown, and grown, and we meet as a – like we just met yesterday with [Case 1 Head Start staff member] and [Case 1Iementary staff member]...from the time I got here eight years ago to now, we have really tried to make it more of a cohesive program. So it's not our Head Start teachers and our Head Start associates are doing this and the [Case 1 Elementary] teachers and [Case1 elementary associates] are doing this; it is really like a braided program, and we've really tried really hard to make it more oneness and more cohesive. And so I've gotten an opportunity to see that kind of transition and I will tell you it's helped culturally with the program." (Principal, Case 1)*

The Head Start Director in Case 1 agreed, saying that the partnership is grounded in *"The idea that we're all in it together."* Similarly, the Case 3 partnership is longstanding and was formally established about 12 years ago when the Head Start and LEA executed their first MOU, and worked together to establish Head Start classrooms embedded within elementary schools, set up formal protocols for the hiring and supervision of Head Start teachers, identify opportunities for professional development, and streamline classroom procedures.

Overall, we did not find that the length of the cross-system partnership correlated with the strength of the partnership. In other words, partnerships that have been longstanding did not have more frequent meetings at different levels of the system or more aligned goals and vision for supporting transitions. In fact, some partnerships that have been longstanding have had to make recent efforts to ensure the partnership continues to be viable and intentional. Therefore, no matter when partnerships were formed, staff from the two systems talked about the importance of coming together to make sure the partnership is grounded in similar goals and that staff are working together intentionally to support children and families.

What Head Start and LEAs Contribute to the Partnership

Partnerships between Head Start and LEAs formed to support families and children living in the communities being served and not specifically to help support transitions. However, through these partnerships, staff talked about how the contributions from each of the systems helped to align and support the experiences of children and families as they transition. When describing what they each 'brought to the partnership,' Head Start leaders across the cases described similar contributions. LEA leaders were also similar to each other in responses, but their contributions differed from Head Start leaders.

Head Start participants described providing their LEA partners with child-specific information and data and jointly working to align preschool programs. In addition, Head Start training is also open to LEA staff to attend. In some cases, Head Start also provided wrap-around family services to all preschool families in the partner district (Cases 1 and 5). In sites with co-located classrooms (where Head Start children—in either a stand-alone or blended classroom—were co-located within an LEA elementary school with kindergarten classrooms), Head Start participants also talked about providing playground equipment (Case 2) and classroom supplies and materials (Cases 1 and 2).

On the LEA side, however, it was less clear in some cases who was involved in supporting transitions. Even so, in all cases, there was at least one district-level staff person whose formal role was to focus on supporting early education and thus involved

in supporting transitions. LEAs also provided space to Head Start—especially in schools with co-located classrooms and/or separate district buildings that housed early childhood classrooms. In places with co-located classrooms and early childhood centers in district-run buildings, LEAs also provided supplies and materials and extra staff to support the operation of early childhood centers.

Table 11 brings together information about the length of the partnerships and the descriptions of what participants described as Head Start-provided resources and LEA-provided resources.

Table 11. Length of partnership and the instrumental support provided by Head Start and by LEAs as a condition of the partnership

Case	Length of Partnership	Head Start Provided…	LEA Provided…
1	~15 years	• Wrap-around family services to all preschool families in district regardless of funding (vision screening, dental care, family services, etc.) • Child-specific information and data • Staff to support transition (Onsite staff person) • Materials (books, school supplies, etc.) • Training for preschool teachers	• Space (Head Start classrooms co-located within elementary school) and utilities • Materials (books, school supplies, etc.) • Meals for all preschool children, including children in Head Start • Staff to support transitions • Specialized Teachers/Classes (all Head Start students get physical education and music) • Preschool teachers (co-located in classrooms with Head Start teachers)
2	~3 years LEA-a [LEA-b length of partnership unknown]	• Playground equipment (Head Start center/elementary school) • Staff to support transitions • Materials (books, school supplies, etc.) • Child-specific information and data	• Space (Some Head Start classrooms co-located within elementary school) and utilities • Materials (books, school supplies, etc.) • Staff to support transitions
3	~12 years	• Training for preschool teachers • Child-specific information and data	• Oversight for Head Start special education staff • Preschool teachers (co-located in classrooms with Head Start teachers)

Case	Length of Partnership	Head Start Provided…	LEA Provided…
4	Longstanding partnership (~15 years), but only recently (last ~4 years) become more intentional	• Training for preschool teachers • Child-specific information and data	• Space (Some Head Start classrooms co-located within elementary school) and utilities
5	Longstanding partnership, but only recently (last ~4 years) become more intentional	• Wrap-around family services to all preschool families in district regardless of funding (vision screening, dental care, family services, etc.)	• County level intermediary provided funding for professional development, coaching, training, teacher-teacher meetings • County level intermediary provided staff to support transitions

Each of the Cases had identified goals and expectations for the partnership. For example, the Case 4 partnership strengthened after staff began to talk about their primary goals. As the Head Start Director expressed, “We’ve always had a relationship. It was just never this close before. It was never this strategic for long-term goals.” In some of the cases, the focus areas were very specific. For instance, Case 4 Head Start and LEA staff started by concentrating on improving attendance across the district and kindergarten readiness. Staff in Cases 1 and 5 focused on fostering greater alignment of curriculum, perspectives, and practices between Head Start/pre-k and kindergarten classrooms. In Case 3, goals were more general to supporting children. As one LEA Staff member explained, *“So I think the easy part is that we all have the same goal of providing the best we can for the kids that need it the most because we're not a universally funded system.”*

In some of the Cases, goals and visions around kindergarten transitions were focused on specific subpopulations such as children with special needs or English learners. For example, Case 4 staff worked on supporting children and families with special needs. Similarly, in Case 3, Head Start and the LEA coordinated to support children with special needs and on addressing the needs of children and families experiencing homelessness. They coordinated through an LEA-sponsored program that provides services and supports, including assistance with school enrollment, transportation, education, and referrals to community agencies. In Case 5, participants both implicitly and explicitly stated that the goals of coordination were to create a more seamless experience for all families; however, the main special population Case 5 worked with were families who were not fluent in English and/or parents with limited literacy.

In other cases, the goals and visions were more generally focused on all children. For example, in Cases 1 and 2, the partners did not identify a clear focus area or goals for the partnership beyond supporting children and families through the transition into kindergarten. Staff in these cases said they supported the general population served, but also had dedicated staff (e.g., disabilities coordinators, family advocates) assigned to support families and children with disabilities.

Occasionally, individual relationships between and among staff drove a more intentional partnership focused on supporting children. For example, one of the Head Start Manager/Coordinators in Case 2 explained that the LEA-a partnership is smoother for students in need of special education services and that the teachers and special education staff have a better relationship compared to their relationship with LEA-b. One contextual element that may contribute to this is the co-location of Site 2 Head Start within LEA-a's elementary school, which provides access to a full-time special education teacher. Head Start staff talked about their stronger relationship with certain LEA-a staff, saying:

> *"We work really closely with SPED, special education. In fact, we have two staff onsite in our building full time, which is amazing, because none of the other districts have that. So, to have a SPED teacher and a speech teacher onsite." (Director of Head Start, Case 2)*

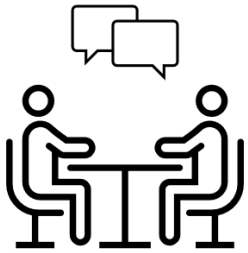
Another Case 2 Head Start staff member commented that working with LEA-a and their special education staff is easier than it is in some other partner districts:

> *"I think SPED stuff in [LEA-a] is a lot easier. Anytime we have to work with SPED or get kids [unintelligible], that is easier, and there's a better relationship with the teachers and the SPED staff down there than there is in [other district]" (Head Start Manager/Coordinator, Case 2)*

Both LEA and Head Start staff cited the origin of Case 4's deepened partnership at a kindergarten transitions summit sponsored and hosted by the Office of Head Start four years prior. Initially unaware of each other's presence at the summit, both Head Start and LEA staff ultimately introduced themselves for the first time and formed a "work team" that traveled home with them after the summit. One LEA administrator explained that prior to the event, *"We worked in silos...early childhood was one silo. Special ed was I silo. Curriculum was a silo...we weren't working collaboratively together."* After the summit, this administrator explained that in recognizing each other's transitions work both within the LEA and with Head Start, *"We just kind of looked at each other and said, "we should be doing this together!'"* From then on, both LEA and Head Start staff reported closer relationships and collaboration amongst leadership, who decided to center special education in their new kindergarten transition efforts. Rather than

maintain the previous silos, however, an LEA administrator, as well as other LEA staff, now engage on transitions with Head Start as a team.

The result of their efforts was a revamped approach to students with IEPs. The team wanted students with IEPs spread across high-quality classrooms throughout the district for full school days. To achieve this goal, Case 4 leadership facilitated logistics and information sharing among teachers through a "pre-k planning group" working throughout the summer. The Head Start Director explained that Head Start staff work more closely with LEA special education staff than any other staff within the LEA. This includes close collaboration between Head Start's Manager/Coordinator and the LEA special education administrator. As a result, children with IEPs now have tailored transition supports, and teachers receiving those children get the information and preparation they need to fully support those children. The LEA special education administrator reports that this planning group also prepared tailored supports for children *without* IEPs but with demonstrated need, showing how transition efforts targeted towards one group of children can benefit others.



Head Start and LEA staff coordinated and collaborated via regular and structured meetings, which provided opportunities for the development of relationships and trust among partners. Meetings between Head Start and LEA staff often focused on the broader goal of increasing alignment across the systems (such as furthering P-3 alignment efforts), but also across/throughout the partnership in general. Most of the meetings only included horizontal cross-system teams (Head Start with other LEA preschool-focused staff). There were a few vertical team meetings, which included Head Start and kindergarten and K-12 elementary school staff, along with district preschool staff, if applicable. Teams included both top leadership level teams—often the Directors of Head Start and LEA superintendents or top-level LEA directors. Other meetings were comprised of Head Start Managers/Coordinators with LEA department directors. There were also some meetings with a mixture of school-based Head Start program staff, which included Head Start Managers/Coordinators with school principals, other school staff, and sometimes teachers.

Few cases had regularly scheduled meetings devoted specifically to supporting transitions. For example, in Case 3, the Head Start Manager/Coordinator had monthly meetings with their partner school district's director of preschool and with other Head Start staff. When asked what they talked about during these leadership meetings, this Head Start staff member replied, *"I can't think of anything specific that has come up related to transition at those meetings. There haven't been things, but it tends to be more of the day-to-day kind of operations of the partnership."* In several cases (Cases 1, 2, and 4), there were teams or small groups that met regularly to focus specifically on

aligning the Head Start program with other LEA preschool programming. For example, in Case 1, staff were focused primarily on horizontal alignment of preschool, Head Start, and LEA curriculum and assessments.

However, in only two of the cases (Cases 1 and 4) participants described specific teams and team meetings devoted to supporting transitions into kindergarten. When these types of meetings occurred, efforts were often centered around specific transition-related event planning (such as joint community events, kindergarten classroom and/or elementary school visits, and meet-and-greets). For example, there is a Head Start "Transition Team" in Case 4, which is city-wide and includes Head Start leaders, school principals, and community support agencies. The Transition Team meets several times per year to discuss transition strategies and plan events. For example, the Case 4 Head Start Executive Director explained that the "Transition Team" hosts events such as a city-wide community agency information event. These are intended to get all the child care centers, pre-k programs, home child care, and other support agencies in one place to explain the importance of preparing children for kindergarten. During these events, Head Start staff raise any emerging issues. They also host family kindergarten events at the library. For example, the Head Start Executive Director said, *"We had about half [of the agencies] participate, actually helped…in our transition to K events."* In addition, Case 4 also has a grant supported horizontal "Early Literacy Team" that brings together both LEA preschool and Head Start teachers and is led by the district's Director of Literacy.

> *"So our Early Literacy Team, our early childhood team, is fairly large. We meet monthly, bimonthly, sometimes weekly. And this year, through a grant called [Grant A], we've been working with [Grant A Representative] on aligning some more strategies together to ensure that we were providing more experiences for the transition process." (LEA Director, Case 4)*

Only recently had staff in Case 1 begun to coordinate and build relationships *between* the Head Start/preschool and kindergarten. The Head Start and kindergarten teacher meetings primarily focused on talking about how to better align learning expectations as children transition into kindergarten and to begin discussing differing perspectives of what it means to be kindergarten ready. All preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers in Case 1 attended these meetings, which were facilitated by an onsite Head Start Manager/Coordinator and onsite LEA Director.

Even though only two of the cases had specific teams devoted to supporting transitions, in all other cases there were meetings scheduled with teachers from both systems to share data and information—oftentimes child and family specific—to support the transition between Head Start and kindergarten. The Case 5 Head Start Director described the data exchange as "the transition meeting that happens in between teachers to teacher to talk about children." Similarly, in Case 2, structured meetings are

set for Head Start and other preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers in LEA-b to discuss incoming children's needs and the best placement for kindergarten classes. The LEA-b Principal said that meetings take place quarterly and described the purpose of those meetings:

> *"Most of the time, it's just discussions about, you know, if there's students that might have a harder time with the transitions, so that we can be aware in this building what those needs might be, so that we can provide supports for them as they transition or before that happens over here. We also discuss like different skills that they work on or have worked on." (Case 2 LEA-b Principal)*

Table 12 includes a list of the different types of meetings that took place in each of the Cases.

Table 12. Cross-System Meeting Structures

Case	Grantee & District Leadership Level Meetings	Center & School Leadership Level Meetings	Meetings With Teachers And Other Head Start And LEA Staff (Head Start & Other Preschool/Pre-k Programs OR Head Start And Kindergarten)	Multi-Level System Meetings
1	• Frequent informal meetings; no identified regularly scheduled meetings at this level	• Monthly meetings with school principal, Head Start Onsite Supervisor, LEA Early Education Director (sometimes Family Service Worker, Disabilities Coordinator, and other school-level staff (OT/PT, Speech, as needed)) • Daily meetings between Head Start Onsite Supervisor and LEA Early Childhood Director to talk about aligning preschool programming and more recently aligning preschool and kindergarten	• Three meetings (during the school year we collected data) with Head Start/pre-k and kindergarten teachers (along with site level leaders) to talk about aligning preschool and kindergarten perspectives and kindergarten readiness expectations. • Informal interactions between Head Start and other pre-k teachers and between Head Start and kindergarten teachers due to co-location	
2			• Informal interactions between Head Start and other pre-k teachers and between Head Start and kindergarten teachers due to co-location	

Case	Grantee & District Leadership Level Meetings	Center & School Leadership Level Meetings	Meetings With Teachers And Other Head Start And LEA Staff (Head Start & Other Preschool/Pre-k Programs OR Head Start And Kindergarten)	Multi-Level System Meetings
3	• Monthly leadership team meetings. Participants include the Head Start Executive Director and Managers (Education, Family Services, Disabilities and Mental Health Coordinator) and the Early Education Director at the LEA, Preschool Director, along with LEA Early Childhood Specialists and Coaches. Some meetings addressed transitions but also focused on other joint efforts. • Quarterly meetings that involve these staff, but meetings were “hit or miss.”	• Regular meetings between Head Start Center Director and preschool staff that addressed expectations	• Informal interactions between Head Start and other pre-k teachers and between Head Start and kindergarten teachers due to co-location	

Case	Grantee & District Leadership Level Meetings	Center & School Leadership Level Meetings	Meetings With Teachers And Other Head Start And LEA Staff (Head Start & Other Preschool/Pre-k Programs OR Head Start And Kindergarten)	Multi-Level System Meetings
4	• Regular collaboration meetings focused on special education issues, chronic absenteeism, and setting long-term goals for the partnership; Meetings planning for co-hosting of events, including transition-related events		• Monthly meetings (but sometimes more frequently) with Early Literacy Team regarding supporting individual students as well as alignment in curriculum and instruction. Team included Head Start and kindergarten teachers, along with LEA Director of Early Literacy • Informal interactions between Head Start and other pre-k teachers and between Head Start and kindergarten teachers, to coordinate and support students with special needs	• City-wide Head Start-hosted Transition Team meetings Principals and community support agencies invited. Focused on planning and hosting events for cross collaboration around transitions • Meetings with Head Start transitions team several times a year including principals and Head Start grantee

Case	Grantee & District Leadership Level Meetings	Center & School Leadership Level Meetings	Meetings With Teachers And Other Head Start And LEA Staff (Head Start & Other Preschool/Pre-k Programs OR Head Start And Kindergarten)	Multi-Level System Meetings
5			• School coordinated meetings with teachers to exchange and talk about assessment data between Head Start and kindergarten teachers after children have entered kindergarten. Coordinated time for teachers to meet each other and discuss each student.	• Regional education agency hosted professional development, coaching, peer learning sessions on P-3 alignment prior to the pandemic; monthly meetings included principals, site managers, family advocates, and teachers from both systems

Co-location created spaces for informal discussions between Head Start and kindergarten teachers, which staff (in some cases) thought led to smoother transitions. For example, one kindergarten teacher in Case 1 explained:

> *"So, we talked to the preschool teachers about it, and we said, 'Hey, one of the things we're noticing, like they don't even really know how to hold scissors, how to cut, how to open and close them.' The next year when we got the kids in school it was, like, holy cow, these kids can cut because they listened to us and they were like, 'We need to have them cut more than what they were doing.'" (Kindergarten Teacher, Case 1)*

Similarly in Case 2, informal connections between Head Start and kindergarten teachers took place in LEA-a. One Head Start Teacher, for instance, said that sometimes the kindergarten teachers will "come and peek in on the classroom and see what we're up to." Head Start teachers also said they will sit down with the kindergarten teachers to go over each child in separate one-on-one meetings rather than in a group meeting.

In the next section, we describe the results of the staff collaboration survey to illuminate the patterns in collaborations across roles and systems.

Staff Working Relationships and Collaboration to Support Transitions

To better understand working relationships to support transitions in each Case, we administered a staff collaboration survey. Surveys were intended to provide a better understanding of the professional relationship structure within each case including the types of staff within and across systems who collaborate with each other to support the transition process. This survey was shared with all staff we interviewed. A link was shared for an online survey at the completion of their interview. The purpose of this analysis was to understand patterns of collaborative interactions among staff within Head Start, LEA, and community partner sites. We used the survey to examine those collaborations both within and across organizations, and both across and within each Case. **Table 13** lists the number of participants for each role across all five Cases for a total of 47 participants (81% response rate).

Table 13. Number of Participants to the Staff Collaboration Survey by Title and Case

Role	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	TOTAL
Head Start Director	2	1	0	1	1	5
Head Start Center Director	1	1	1	1	3	7
Head Start Teacher	2	1	1	1	0	5
Head Start Staff	0	2	2	2	2	8
District Administrator	2	1	1	1	4	9
District Staff	0	0	0	0	0	0
School Principal	0	1	1	0	0	2
Kindergarten Teacher	2	2	2	1	1	8
School Staff	0	0	1	0	0	1
District Pre-k Teacher	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community/Other Service Provider	1	0	1	0	0	2
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**10**	**9**	**10**	**7**	**11**	**47**

What Did the Staff Collaboration Survey Ask About?

- Each participant was asked their job title and to name up to 10 individuals (five within their organization and five outside of their organization) with which they collaborated around supporting kindergarten transitions. Each participant was also asked to record the job title of each of these collaborators, the frequency with which they collaborated, and how instrumental the collaborator was in helping ensure successful transitions. For details on how the data was cleaned and processed and full individual case results, please see **Appendix C**.
- This analysis examines collaboration according to the number of collaborators in a given role, frequency of collaboration, and the degree to which a collaboration is instrumental to the participant's work around transitions. The number of collaborators in a given role was based on how the survey participant defined the roles of their collaborators.

Figure 9 shows the results for the staff collaboration survey inclusive of all participants across all five Cases. They reflect the extent to which participants collaborate with other staff members—both within and outside of their organization—in terms of number of collaborators, frequency, and how instrumental they consider the collaboration to be when it comes to their work on transitions.

A few notes on how to read and interpret the figures below:

- Along the vertical **y-axis** are **roles of the participants**. The labels contain, in parentheses, the number of participants from each role.
- Along the horizontal **x-axis** are roles of those the participants **listed as collaborators**.
- Roles are color-coded by the three possible organizations: green for Head Start, blue for LEA, and pink for Community Organization.
- Collaborators listed by participants as "other" are collapsed into one category. This included, for example, a general "coordinator" with no additional information. No participants themselves are categorized as "other" since we already knew the roles of each participant.

- The boxes in the middle of each figure reflect the average (mean) response for the respective question according to participant role. Larger circles correspond to higher averages (see figure legend).
 - The number assigned to each sized circle (see figure legend) of the "**Number of Collaborators**" graph indicates the average number of times a participant in each role listed collaborators in each role.
 - The number assigned to each sized circle (see figure legend) of the **"Frequency**" graph indicates the average frequency of collaboration provided by a participant in each role for a collaborator in each role. For example, if three participants in one particular role (e.g., Head Start teacher) said they had collaborators in with a common role (e.g., school principal), we averaged how frequently those Head Start teachers collaborated school principals. Frequency questions were coded as such:
 - Less than once a year (1)
 - Once a year (2)
 - Once a quarter (3)
 - Once a month (4)
 - Once a week (5)
 - More than once a week (6)
 - The number assigned to each sized circle (see figure legend) of the **"Instrumental"** graph indicates the average rating of how instrumental participants in each role (e.g., district administrators) reported their collaboration was with someone in a different role (e.g., school principals). Instrumental questions were coded as such:
 - Not at all instrumental (1)
 - Slightly instrumental (2)
 - Somewhat instrumental (3)
 - Very instrumental (4)
 - Extremely instrumental (5)

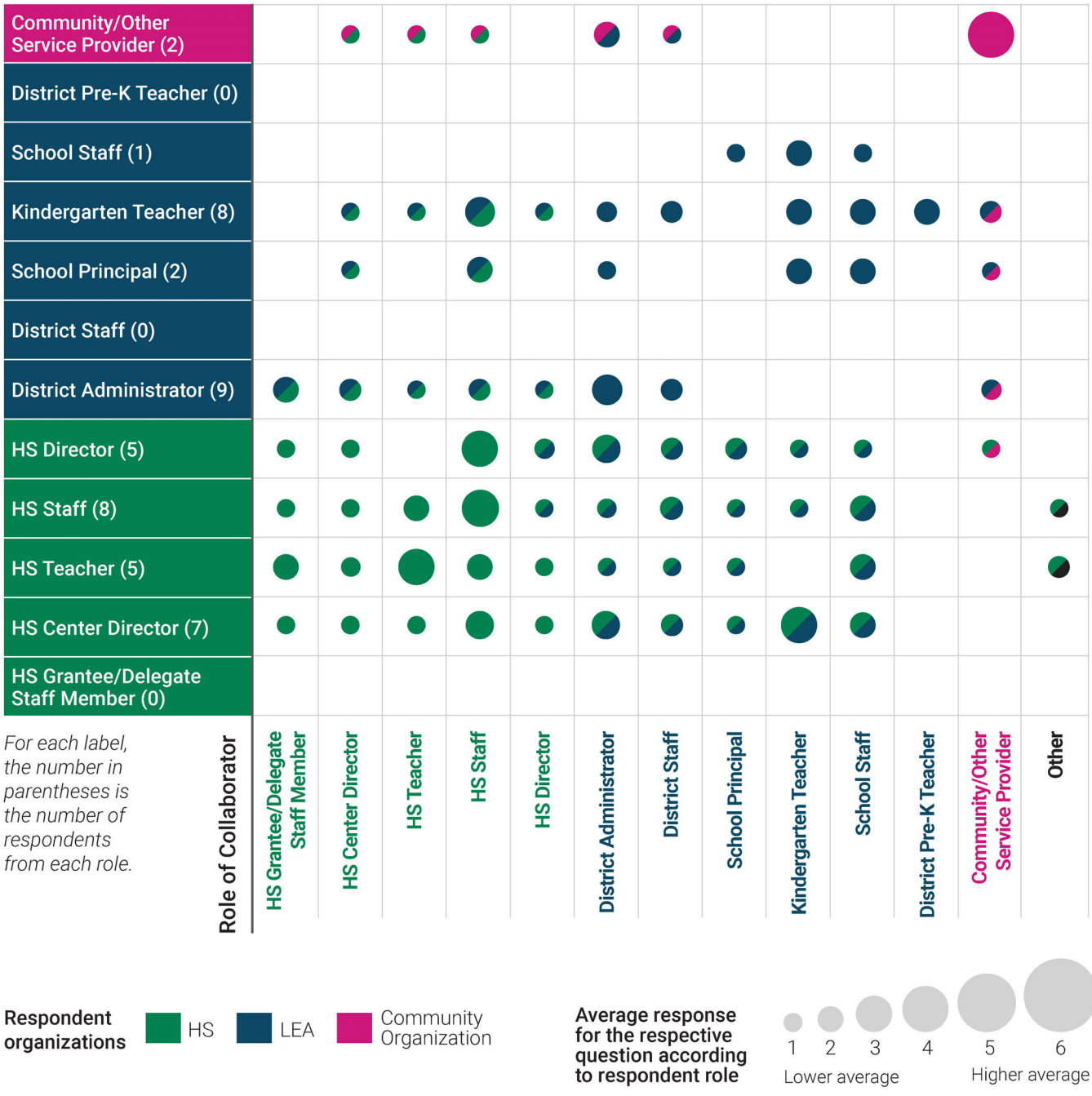
Figure 9. Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results Across Cases

Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Overall

We asked case studies staff participants in both Head Start (HS) and Local Education Agencies (LEA): "Who do you collaborate with most closely, both inside and outside your organization or school, to support children and families for the transition from Head Start to kindergarten?"

Number of Collaborators

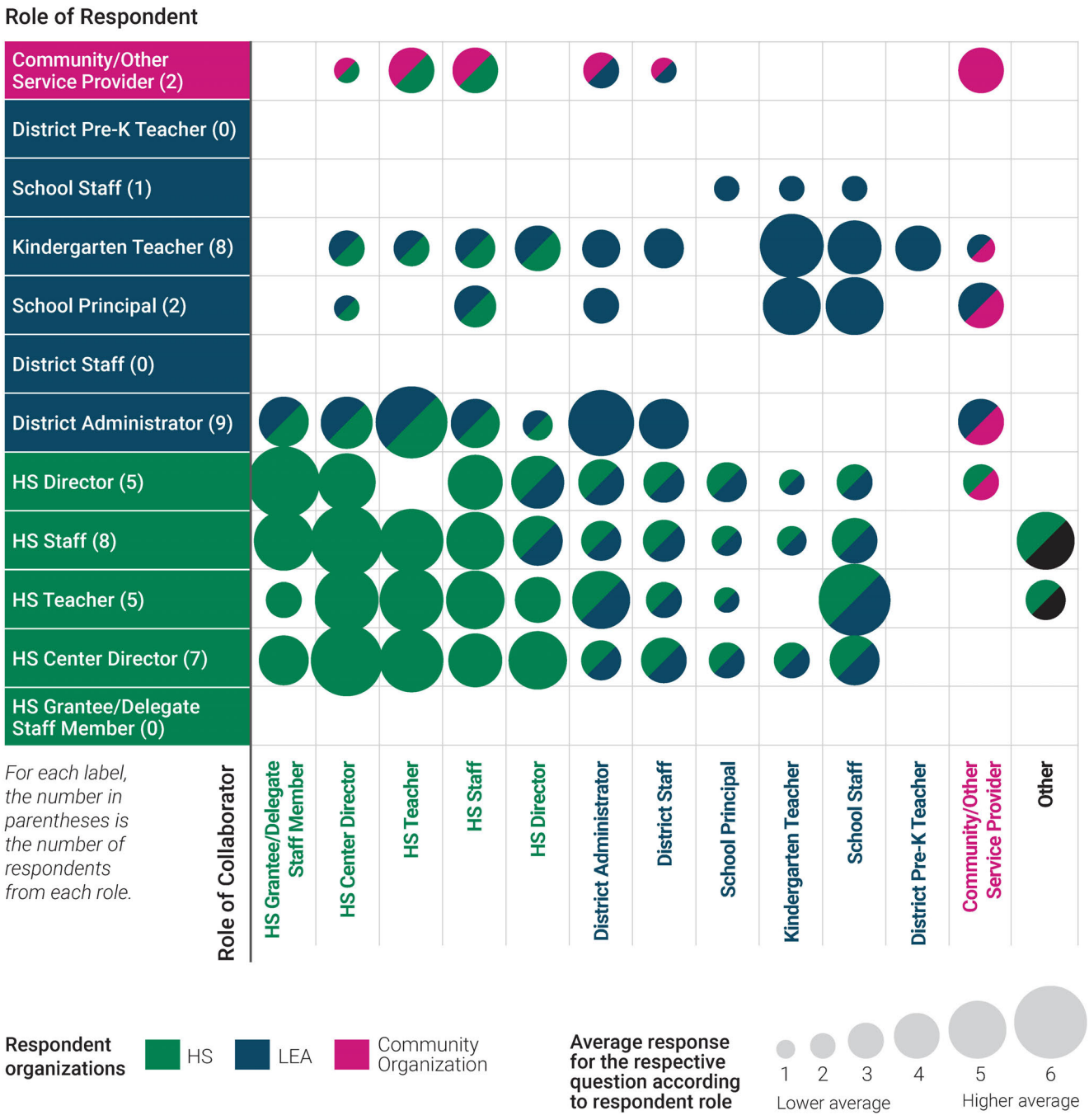
The number in each box indicates the average number of times a respondent listed collaborators.



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Overall cont.

Frequency

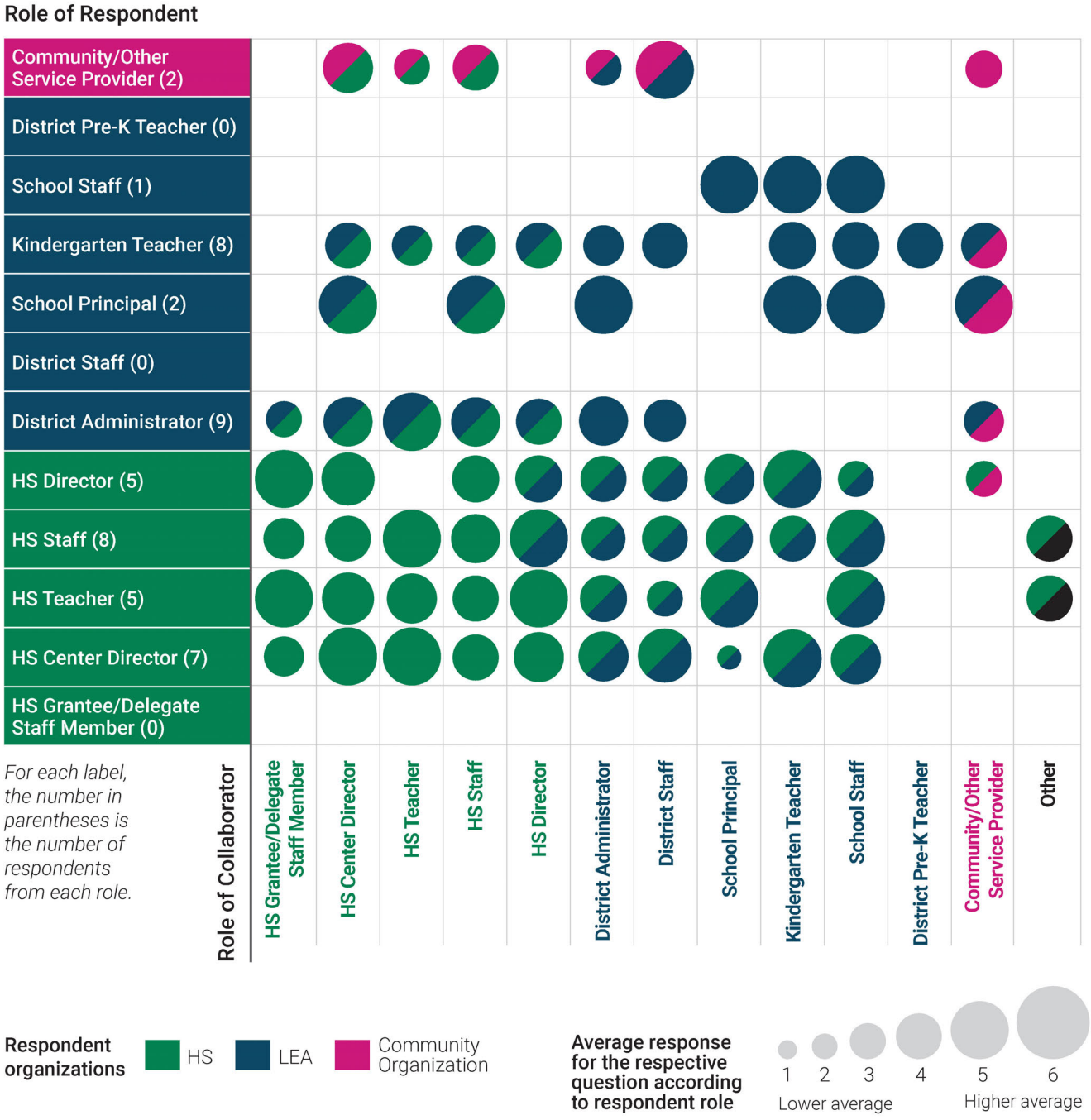
The number in each box indicates the average frequency of collaboration, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Less than once a year, once a year, once a quarter, once a month, once a week, more than once a week



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Overall cont.

Instrumental

The number in each box indicates the average rating of how instrumental a collaboration was, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Not at all instrumental, slightly instrumental, somewhat instrumental, very instrumental



Overall, participants across Head Start, LEA, and Community Service Providers reported more collaborators within their own organization than outside of their organization. Participants also indicated that they collaborated more frequently with individuals within their organization (once a month to once a week) than outside of their organization (about once a quarter). However, participants reported that collaborations within and between organizations were similarly instrumental to their work around

transitions. Participants most often reported that their collaborations were “very instrumental,” regardless of who it was with.

Between organizations, Head Start teachers (*n*=5) reported collaborating more than once a week with LEA school staff. Head Start staff, teachers, and directors reported that their most frequent and instrumental collaboration, on average, was with LEA school staff. From the other direction, kindergarten teachers and LEA school principals reported collaborating once a quarter to once a month with Head Start center staff and Head Start grantee/delegate staff. This finding aligns with what we heard in interviews.

No Head Start teachers (*n*=5) reported collaborating with kindergarten teachers, and no kindergarten teachers (*n*=8) reported collaborating with Head Start teachers. While not all teachers in our study responded to the staff collaboration survey, this matches with some of our Case descriptions. For example, Case 3 Head Start teachers said they did not collaborate with kindergarten teachers. However, this finding may reflect that the teacher level collaboration is often facilitated by staff in Head Start and in LEA rather than by teachers themselves. Head Start teachers, for example, may not collaborate with individual kindergarten teachers, but they may attend meetings together or share information about transition-related events.

Overall, these findings—from those who completed the survey—are quite consistent with the information we heard in interviews. This staff collaboration survey offers a different approach to learning about within- and across-system collaboration, even under circumstances where understanding the full set of relationships is difficult to achieve.

Table 14 highlights the individual differences in responses by Case. Full results for each Case can be found in **Appendix C**.

Table 14. Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results by Case

Case	Number of collaborators	Frequency of collaboration	Degree to which collaboration was instrumental
1	Typically, 1-3 collaborators in any given role	• Head Start participants and LEA district administrators tended to report that their collaboration with individuals from **both** Head Start and the LEA occurred at least monthly.	• Head Start participants and LEA district administrators tended to report that their collaboration with individuals from **both** Head Start and the LEA was “very” instrumental.

Case	Number of collaborators	Frequency of collaboration	Degree to which collaboration was instrumental
2	Typically, 1-3 collaborators in any given role	• Head Start and LEA participants tended to report that within-site collaboration happened about once a week, while between-site collaboration happened about once a quarter.	• Head Start and LEA participants typically reported that both within- and between-site collaborations were “very” to “highly” instrumental.
3	Typically, 1-3 collaborators in any given role	• Head Start and LEA tended to report that within-site collaboration happened at least once a quarter, while between-site collaboration happened about once a year.	• LEA staff reported that almost all of their collaborations were “extremely” instrumental. • Head Start staff typically reported within-site collaboration as “very” instrumental, while external collaborations were more often reported as “extremely” instrumental.
4	Typically, 1-4 collaborators in any given role	• Head Start staff reported that within-site collaboration happened about once a week, while between-site collaboration happened about once a quarter. • The kindergarten teacher reported collaborating equally as often within-site as between-site, while the district administrator reported collaborating within-site (once a week) more often than between-site (once a quarter).	• Head Start staff reported that collaborations within-site are on average more instrumental than between-site collaborations. Within-site collaborations were more likely to be reported as “extremely” instrumental, but between-site collaborations were more likely to be reported as “very” instrumental. • LEA staff reported that their collaborations within and between-site were equally instrumental.
5	Typically, 1-2 collaborators in any given role	• Head Start and LEA staff reported similar frequencies for both within-site and between-site collaboration, about once a quarter to once a month.	• Head Start and LEA staff reported that the extent to which collaboration was instrumental was similar for both within-site and between-site collaboration, typically “somewhat” to “very” instrumental.

Partnerships with Community Organizations and Intermediary Agencies

In this study, we asked participants to tell us about any partnerships they have with community organizations or intermediary agencies and what role the partners play in supporting transitions (**Figure 10**). While Head Start programs are required to partner with community organizations to help with delivering services to children and families, the same is not true of LEAs. Some LEAs do have external partnerships, but it is not a requirement. While Head Start and LEA partnerships with community groups and agencies occurs, these partnerships are not necessarily set up to support children and families through the transition from Head Start to kindergarten. However, we wanted to investigate whether these partnerships do play a role in supporting transitions and if so, how. There is a gap in the literature and our understanding of the key role that partnering organizations and agencies play in supporting Head Start and elementary schools to create more successful transitions for children and families.

Figure 10. Roles of an Intermediary

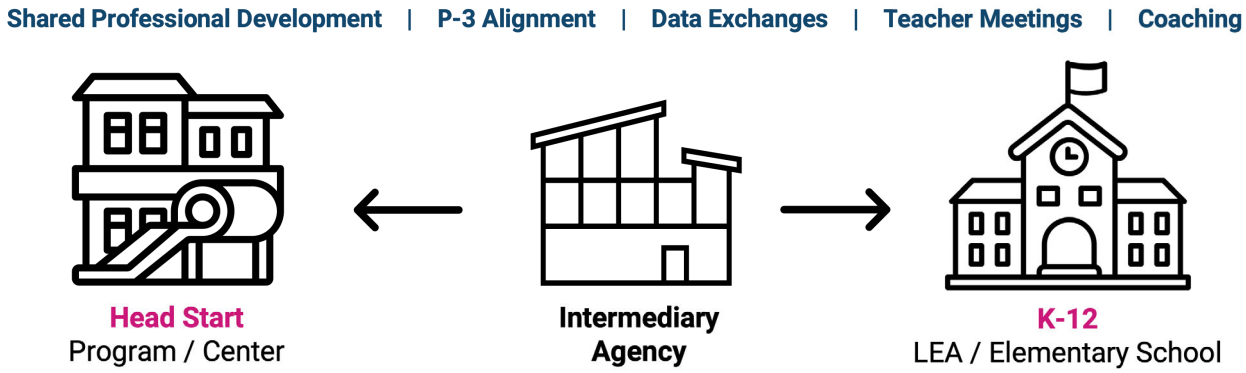


Table 15. List of Community Organizations and Agencies and their Roles by Case

Cases	Community Organizations/Agency Partnerships	Role of Community Organizations/Agency Partners
1	Public Health Agencies and Other Community Health Programs	Head Start partners with public health agencies and other community health programs to provide health screenings and services for children and families.
	State Agencies	Head Start works with the state-level agencies to coordinate specialized learning resources and supports for families with children with disabilities. Head Start staff work with LEA staff to make sure they have the child's IEP when they transition to kindergarten and that supports and services are continued once they reach the school, including OT/PT, speech, etc.

Cases	Community Organizations/Agency Partnerships	Role of Community Organizations/Agency Partners
	Organizations that provide counseling services	LEA partners with an organization that provides counseling services to children and families at the elementary school. Also provided on site at the school include physical well-being and supports for pregnant mothers.
	Local Library	LEA partners with and refers families to the local library, which houses a mental health agency that provides counseling services to all members of the school community.
	Community Action Agency	Where the Head Start is located – also provides services from heating assistance to substance abuse counseling for families in the community.
2	Local hospital	Head Start partners with the local hospital to provide birth records for infants born in the area.
	Public health agencies	Head Start partners with public health agencies to provide health screenings and vaccinations and other health-related services for children and families.
	Homeless shelters	Head Start partners with homeless shelters to ensure families who are homeless are part of the Head Start enrollment process.
	Area reservations	Head Start partners with area reservations and Head Start centers to coordinate Head Start referrals.
	Non-Profit Community organization	LEA partners with a non-profit that helps focused support students with special needs.
3	Organizations that provide services to families and children experiencing housing insecurity	Head Start partners mostly as a way to receive referrals and as a way to exchange information about families being serviced by both Head Start and these organizations.
	Local library	LEA partners with the local library which hosts academic and social exposure events for children and families.*
	Local ECE network non-profit agency	LEA partners with a non-profit ECE agency that also provides professional development for childcare and family supports including transition practices, like the Kindergarten Roundups.*

Cases	Community Organizations/Agency Partnerships	Role of Community Organizations/Agency Partners
	Local church	Provides backpacks with school supplies for children and families – funded by local businesses.*
4	Local Library	Hosts kindergarten transition events.*
	Community Health Organizations	Head Start partners with community health organizations to provide vaccines and other health-related screenings and services.
	Local Hospital	Provided behavioral trainings to teachers around a special needs project.
	Private company that provides SEL learning and supports	LEA partnered with this organization to receive funding to purchase an app that pushed info out to incoming families to help prepare their students for kindergarten transition.*
5	Intermediary Organization	Suite of services provided to both Head Start and LEA, including training, coaching, and peer learning opportunities, and early childhood assessments to support P-3 alignment efforts as well as supporting transitions.*
	Community Action Agency	Where the Head Start is located – also provides wrap-around services to families in the community.

*These partnerships are directly involved in supporting transitions.

Some partnerships with community organizations played a unique role in supporting transitions. Community partners helped support transitions by hosting events, funding activities and supports, and—in some cases—partners were directly involved in supporting transitions.

In two cases (Cases 1 and 2) community organizations provided wrap-around services (e.g., Health and vision screenings) to families and children while they were in Head Start. In Case 1 these same wrap-around services followed families and children as they transitioned to kindergarten. Head Start and LEA staff partner with different community and service organizations in the area, and families are able to take advantage of these partnerships— whether they are in Head Start or not—and all services are continued as children and families transition into kindergarten. Staff in Case 1 saw the continuity of services and supports as meaningful in helping children and families transition successfully. For instance, participants in this case expressed that many of the services that Head Start offers align with necessities for a child's enrollment in kindergarten. For example, many states require that incoming children have a dental exam upon entering school, and such records are shared internally from Head Start to the elementary school for Case 1. These services smooth the transition

for families by offering needed care for children while potentially addressing enrollment requirements. The continuity of services into kindergarten, according to staff, also helps provide consistency for families. For example, the onsite Head Start Manager/Coordinator said:

> *"I think another great thing is, if you have kiddos in pre-k or third grade, as a parent, it's all right here. It's the same. It's one communication, versus this way, versus this way. So, we're a little more unified than what it would be if we were a stand-alone. A lot of your services are—we have a lot of supports when it comes to services. That's a huge advantage. And again, that's all part of transition because those services transition over." (Head Start Manager/Coordinator, Case 1)*

As noted in the table, community partners and agencies also provided extra resources, space, and materials to support transitions. Several sites hosted transition-related events at local libraries (e.g., as described in the previous chapter on practices).

Case Example

The Positive Role of Intermediaries

Uniquely, in Case 5 a regional education agency served as the primary intermediary/external government community organization that works among Head Start and LEA partners. The intermediary organization provided educational programs and services to students, families, and school staff across the region. Their model is intended to centralize certain programming at economies of scale, utilizing specific state funding to deploy programming across ECE and K-12 systems. The intermediary organization served as a key intermediary and bridge between systems in part because their mandates and funding involved both state-based ECE and K-12 initiatives. They coordinated professional development, coaching, QRIS system administration, and assessments. They also had an MOU in place with Site 5 Head Start, and they facilitated close partnerships with multiple school districts related to the kindergarten transition activities discussed in this report. Their presence in this space is crucial to understanding the cross-system relationships, collaborations, and alignment and paints a portrait of what cross-system approaches can look like with an influential intermediary with financial, legal, and political influence over kindergarten transition activities.

Chapter 7: Synthesis of Factors that Influence Transitions

Key Takeaways

- Having committed leadership from both Head Start and the LEA that is focused on supporting transition and alignment encouraged strong cross-system collaboration.
- Common and aligned frameworks and assessments helped provide a mutual language that supported joint practices across the systems.
- Convening and meeting on a regular basis—and at multiple levels within the systems—helped reinforce responsibilities and aligned practices across the partnerships.
- Dedicated staff, resources, and funding streams supported collaborative efforts between Head Start and kindergarten. The absence of dedicated staff focused on coordination across the partnership in both systems limited the implementation of transition practices and cross-system alignment.
- Staff turnover inhibited information sharing and relationship development, which can interrupt established practice or partnerships.
- One-to-many and many-to-many configuration made creating and sustaining relationships across staff more difficult than the one-to-one configuration. These two configurations also presented transition challenges for children and families. For example, a Head Start program may not have access to transportation to all feeder elementary schools within the partner LEA, making pre-kindergarten school visits more difficult for some families and children.

Introduction

In this chapter, we provide a synthesis of factors that influence transitions, including those that help to support transition-related efforts and factors that may make it harder to create and/or maintain cross-system partnerships to support transitions. These factors emerged through our analyses across the cases. In some instances, individual participants identified specific factors that influenced their own transition efforts and, when applicable, we noted that. Overall, committed leadership and shared understandings emerged as key factors that drove the partnerships, promoted cross-system relationships, and supported alignment in practice and professional supports. Dedicating resources, including co-located space and time for staff interaction and coordination, demonstrated a shared investment to the alignment of Head Start and the

LEA. Having time and opportunities to meet helped staff with the ongoing implementation of practices to support transitions. Partnerships to support transitions proved to be more complex in systems with many-to-many, one-to-many, and many-to-one configurations where staff have to deal with complex feeder patterns and manage relationships with multiple partners. In addition, staff turnover interrupted relationships built to support transitions that can impact how families and children experience the transition. We describe each of these factors in more detail in this chapter.

Having shared goals and expectations for the partnership, as well as clarity around partnership roles and responsibilities, helped to focus transition efforts. When partners come together to create shared goals and expectations—and regularly revisit these—they can serve as a helpful guidepost for how to work together to support transitions. Working together on goals and expectations can help strengthen relationships and make the work around transitions more intentional and strategic, as in Case 4. In addition, setting goals and clear expectations that focused on greater alignment in curriculum, perspectives, and practices (as in Cases 1 and 5) can help staff prioritize efforts to maximize transition success for children and families.

Having **committed leaders from both Head Start and the LEA focused on supporting the transition and broader alignment created greater buy-in and support for partnering around transitions.** Being at a higher level of the system, Head Start directors and LEA administrators had sufficient authority (as codified in the MOUs) to convene and serve as a catalyst to work together and implement cross-system practices and strategies. Across cases, we found this commitment was expressed in different ways. Leadership expressed similar perspectives about the goals and benefits of the partnership (all cases). The willingness of decision makers on both sides to compromise or find the “middle ground,” was an important dimension of this commitment (Cases 1 and 2). “Top-down buy-in” and shared investments between partners was another (Cases 2 and 5). In another context, strong, positive relationships at the Head Start and LEA leadership level contributed to their ability to implement decisions and strategies (Case 3).

An approach to the Head Start and LEA partnership that was based on shared perspectives and collaboration facilitated active engagement to support transitions. As noted, cross-system partnerships ranged in duration from more than a decade to just a few years. The strength of the partnerships was grounded in an equal commitment between system leaders—Head Start administrators and LEA superintendents or dedicated early childhood directors—to align policies, dedicate staffing and resources, and support transition practices, whether through Head Start-initiated, LEA-initiated, or joint efforts. The essence of the partnerships was characterized as finding “balance” (Case 1), being on the “same page” (Case 2), or having a shared commitment to help the community (Case 4).

Common and aligned frameworks and assessments helped provide a shared language that supported practice across the systems. Alignment of curricula and assessments across systems facilitated the transition process by supporting kindergarten readiness and expectations. In four cases, we learned that Head Start-LEA partnerships intentionally aligned aspects of curricula, assessments, or instructional strategies between Head Start and kindergarten to support children's academic and social-emotional learning (Cases 1, 2, 3, and 4), which staff identified as a key component of kindergarten readiness. Four Head Start-LEA partnerships used common tools or frameworks to support children's social-emotional learning and development (Cases 1, 2, 3, and 4). These tools, implemented across grade levels, created common expectations, language, and guidelines for children throughout their Head Start and kindergarten education. Two Head Start-LEA partnerships used common curricula and instructional strategies, with one case using Creative Curriculum® activities (Case 3) and another case adopting a common literacy and handwriting program (Case 4). The use of common curricula across systems rests on the foundational alignment of professional supports to facilitate shared understandings and practice.

Co-location of Head Start classrooms in elementary schools demonstrated the commitment of the two systems to allocate resources and create processes for working together to support transitions. Co-location sets the context for coordination across systems by bringing teachers and staff together. It helped support mutual efforts between Head Start teachers and kindergarten staff to support transition-oriented practices for children and families (Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5).

- Teacher-to-Teacher: Informal interactions occurred between Head Start and other pre-k teachers and between Head Start and k teachers (Cases 1, 2, and 3) and for one case, facilitated coordination and support of children with special needs (Case 4). Being in the same building or just across the hall, Head Start and kindergarten staff developed relationships, which supported planning and engagement in transition activities. As noted in **Chapter 5**, kindergarten staff and Head Start teachers co-located in the same building were more likely to engage in regular information exchanges about children (see **Table 14**). However, staff turnover may impede the ability to sustain these relationships and exchanges.
- Child and Families: Cases with co-located classrooms provided informal and formal opportunities to orient children and families to the school environment and kindergarten routines, along with continued engagement with staff. This was more seamless in co-located sites because families were able to meet or get to know other staff in the elementary school prior to their children transitioning into kindergarten.

However, we found less informal and formal cross-grade collaboration occurring in places where Head Start classrooms were located in separate buildings. In one setting

(Case 2, LEA-b), Head Start classrooms were located in a separate early learning building that did not house K-12 staff. Because of this, staff members do not organically see one another during the school day. This appears to be particularly significant for new staff who are not aware of those they would connect with on the other side of the partnership.

Having regular meetings and creating intentional touchpoints helped reinforce responsibilities and practices across the partnerships. As noted for all cases, regular meetings occurred between administrators and management to support transitions. Formal and informal meetings between Head Start and kindergarten teachers occurred as well and were often facilitated by center/school-level leaders. Teachers across the sites—both Head Start and kindergarten—talked about wanting to have more formal ways to connect with one another to bridge that divide.

Dedicated staff, resources, and funding streams supported collaborative efforts between Head Start and kindergarten. For two cases, family support staff were key to supporting families through the transition process and supporting Head Start and LEA join efforts (Case 3 and 5). Along with co-located Head Start classrooms, this included grants or federal or state monetary support (e.g., Title I funding), as well as the investment of human and/or fiscal resources from external partners (e.g., participation in an external collaboration effort, regional education agency, etc.). Shared investments between partners demonstrated commitment of leaders of each system to further the alignment between systems.

Staff turnover can weaken partnership efforts. Frequent turnover among Head Start staff—whether due to transient populations in a metro area or pandemic-related resignations—was mentioned as a challenge for maintaining collaboration (Cases 3, 4, and 5). Turnover can inhibit information sharing practices and disrupt and prevent relationship building across systems. Changes in leadership, such as an LEA superintendent or an elementary principal, may weaken partnerships and need to be codified in policy to support sustainability. For example**,** Head Start teacher turnover in a co-located setting made building relationships with kindergarten teachers and elementary staff difficult and disrupted the continuity for children and families (Case 3). In another case, we saw that responsibilities fulfilled by Head Start family support staff (e.g., enrollment, service transition activities) relied heavily on an individual staff's initiative and strength of relationship with individuals (Case 5). At the partnership level, a superintendent expressed concern about what was going to happen after they left (Case 2, LEA-a).

Complex Head Start-LEA configurations can make relationships more difficult to manage and maintain. The size of the area where the partnership is located and (in some instances) inter-organizational configuration played a role in building and

maintaining partner relationships. For example, in a many-to-one configuration (Case 3), having one LEA made it easier to develop and sustain the Head Start and LEA partnership at the leadership level and continuity of staff. But at the practice level, Head Start and kindergarten teachers did not develop relationships beyond the co-located setting due to dispersion of children to multiple schools in the LEA. Similarly, in one-to-many configurations, Head Start may have stronger relationships with staff in certain partner LEAs versus others because it was hard to maintain strong relationships across multiple LEAs/schools. For example, in Case 4, although the Head Start is co-located within one of the district's elementary schools, not all Head Start children ended up attending kindergarten at that elementary school.

Differing perspectives and teaching models may hinder efforts aimed at alignment across the systems and add to the "jolt" that families and children feel as they transition. One case reported a "disconnect" between Head Start and kindergarten teacher models (Case 4), with Head Start focusing more on developmentally appropriate play-based practices and kindergarten teachers using more teacher-directed models. In another case, the K-12 educational model did not address social-emotional development, which was a strong component of the Head Start curricula (Case 5). In a blended Head Start/state-funded preschool classroom, there were different perspectives on what is developmentally appropriate, what pre-k readiness should entail, and how Head Start teachers teach (Case 1)—all with implications for aligned policy and procedures.

Lack of elementary school staff knowledge or understanding about the foundations and practices of Head Start presented a barrier to shared practice and led to disparaging perspectives about Head Start children and families. In one case, kindergarten teachers expressed a lack of understanding about Head Start (Case 2, LEA-b) or lack of knowledge of Head Start staff (Case 2, LEA-a). Another barrier to fully realizing the potential benefit of alignment across systems was the lack of appreciation for early childhood educators, who—according to Head Start participants—were "not valued as regular teachers" (Case 5). Echoes of this perception carried over to stigma toward Head Start families and children (Case 1 and 2).

Chapter 8: Implications

Introduction

In this chapter, we look back at our case study findings and situate them within what we broadly knew from research and practice prior to this work. We also reflect on how this study supports, expands upon, and challenges the HS2K theory of change (**Figure 3**). Finally, we consider implications for policy, practice, and future research.

As readers review this chapter, we remind them of some of the limitations mentioned earlier (see **Limitations of Interpretations based on Case Study Methods** in Chapter 1). Our case study sample was very small, only focusing on five Head Start-LEA partnerships. These partnerships were selected based on a nomination process and focused on those that already exhibited innovative or promising kindergarten transition approaches. Further, we held interviews with staff who were willing to share their experiences with the project team. With all this in mind, we caution readers to consider the implications presented in this chapter as those learned within these particular cases and contexts; they may not apply universally to all programs, staff, children, and families.

Synthesis of Cases by the 4Ps

To begin this chapter, we present **Table 16**, which summarizes what is happening in each of the cases by the 4Ps. The table shows that each of the Cases exhibited different levels of alignment across the 4Ps—some cases may have more alignment in one or more of the Ps, while having less alignment (or no activity at all) in another P. For example, some cases may have more alignment in perspectives and more joint practices, but no joint professional supports (such as Case 3). Other Cases may have clearer transition-related policies as well as more aligned perspectives on what it means to have a successful transition, but no alignment in transition timeframes/milestones nor have any joint professional supports (such as Case 4). In other words, more alignment or one or more of the 4Ps did not necessarily equate to alignment (or efforts/activities) across all 4Ps. Staff can be actively working on strengthening one of the 4Ps (such as in Case 1 working on aligning perspectives), while relying more on relationships rather than policies to drive transition efforts.

Table 16. Summary of Case Activity by the 4Ps

Perspectives	Policies	Practices	Professional Supports
CASE 1			
• LEA Administrators and staff defined the transition time period as fluid and continuous, while Head Start staff and Head Start and K teachers had more definitive start and end times. • Head Start staff more often defined transition success and outcomes as children having socio-emotional skills that helped prepare them for kindergarten than LEA staff. LEA staff, especially K teachers, were more likely to emphasize academic readiness, and familiarity with the setting and skills as a sign of kindergarten readiness. • Staff had negative perceptions regarding the misalignment between Head Start and kindergarten standards. These negative perceptions led to a lack of coordination across the systems, although there were efforts underway to improve collaboration in this area. • There were some misconceptions and stigma about Head Start; Leaders are working on changing and aligning perspectives.	• There was an MOU between the Head Start and LEA-a partnership, which did not include transition-specific language. However, there were provisions within the MOU that did support transitions, including agreements around data and information sharing to help support smoother transitions. • Case 1 did not have any transition-specific policies, so staff relied more on their longstanding relationships to enact transition practices and strategies. • Other polices that influenced transition efforts included Head Start federal and kindergarten state-level standards.	• Overall, most of the transition-related strategies and practices were coordinated and facilitated by the Head Start/preschool side (data packet for teachers and families, transition to kindergarten specific packet for families, supplies and materials for kindergarten for low-income families, monthly activity calendars for families, home visits with transition goal setting, conferences, kindergarten routine practice, student assistance team support and kindergarten focused lessons and activities). • LEA staff and kindergarten teachers engaged in some transition-related practices and strategies, although their efforts were less robust compared to Head Start teachers and staff (Kindergarten roundup, postcards and newsletters to welcome families, checklist of expectations for kindergarten for families and elementary school tours). • The LEA helped facilitate connections for families and children as they entered into kindergarten and there were some transition practices happening jointly (Kindergarten classroom visits, family literacy and kindergarten readiness nights, formal meetings between Head Start and K teachers, use of common behavioral framework with K).	• There were joint professional development opportunities and supports (such as PLCs) between the Head Start-hired and LEA-hired preschool teachers, leading to an aligned preschool program. • There was a lack of joint professional development opportunities between Head Start teachers and kindergarten teachers, except for a joint training on PBIS. • There were formal meetings between Head Start/Preschool and K teachers to look at data, share what is happening in classrooms, and discuss alignment of perspectives of kindergarten readiness.

Perspectives	Policies	Practices	Professional Supports
CASE 2			
• Participants held widely divergent perspectives about when the transition to kindergarten begins and ends. • Participants had the most agreement on the definitions of transition success and perceived outcomes of all the cases. • Perspectives from both Head Start and LEA staff identified qualities such as social and emotional preparation, academic readiness, and familiarity with the setting and kindergarten expectations as indicators of success and perceived outcomes.	• MOU that outlined the Head Start and LEA-a partnership, which included the goals of the partnership, and the number of staff members each partner provides; and assessment and data sharing efforts. • Head Start staff utilized Head Start standards and policies to guide transition efforts. • LEA-a and LEA-b staff referenced state standards and policies that provided guidance for kindergarten standards, academic milestones, and developmental milestones.	• Most transition practices and strategies were initiated from the Head Start side (Familiarizing children with kindergarten expectations and routines, kindergarten focused curriculum, home visits, using common transition language, providing activities for families to do at home). • LEA-b also facilitated events, such as open houses and Kindergarten Roundup, and shared information with families. • Both Head Start and LEA-a & LEA-b jointly shared data with one another, especially for children with an IEP and engaged in intentional meetings to support and plan for the transition.	• No transition-specific professional development opportunities for Head Start or LEA-a or LEA-b staff. • There were few joint Head Start/LEA professional supports, except for Second Step training, which was used in all preschools in LEA-b (including Head Start) and K classrooms.

Perspectives	Policies	Practices	Professional Supports
CASE 3			
• In Case 3 there were differences in how participants defined the transition time period but more commonality in how participants defined what it means to have a successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten. Head Start transitions began at enrollment and continued throughout the preschool year without a definitive end. For LEA staff, the time period was bounded by the academic calendar, emphasizing the last few months of the preschool year and the first few months of the kindergarten year. • Head Start and LEA staff and parents had similar perspectives of what it means to have a successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten. Head Start and LEA staff and parents spoke about transition success for children as having the social and academic skills needed to succeed in kindergarten. Likewise, Head Start and LEA participants held shared perspectives about the importance of families knowing the expectations for kindergarten. Another commonality in perspectives was that children had a sense of belonging and families felt connected.	• Head Start and LEA have an MOU which focuses on principles to guide the partnership and practices and strategies to support school success for children, along with supervision of preschool teachers and sharing curricula. Regarding transitions, the MOU largely focuses on Head Start and LEA coordination on transition-related activities. It also calls for Head Start to notify the LEA of children that will need transition services and for Head Start to participate in meetings or activities when a child transitions. • Other policies mentioned in interviews by Head Start staff include Head Start Performance Standards and Head Start Standard Operation Procedures (SOP)s.	• Many strategies and practices are implemented by Head Start (information packet with assessment and other kinds of data given to families— who are encouraged to give them to K teachers— conferences and home visits, family resources on transition to kindergarten and expectations, K transition night, and back-to-school supply event). • LEAs have information events, kindergarten roundup, and family meetings prior to the first day of kindergarten. • Some practices and events are jointly coordinated between Head Start and the LEA, including family math night, joint classroom visits, vertical planning, and data and information sharing among Head Start and K teachers.	• No Head Start-specific or LEA-specific professional development or trainings focused on transitions, but transitions are built into the general trainings on child development and family engagement for Head Start. • No joint professional development for Head Start and LEA staff related to transitions.

Perspectives	Policies	Practices	Professional Supports
CASE 4			
• There were few areas of alignment in how participants defined the kindergarten transition time period. • There was some degree of alignment in participants' perceptions of what it means to have a successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten for teachers and staff, but less agreement on the types of supports and activities children and families would benefit from to have a successful transition. For example, Head Start staff tended to focus more on relationships with parents/caregivers and on advocacy for children, whereas Elementary School staff tended to focus on expectations and academics.	• Case 4 had the most detailed policy related to transitions compared to the other Cases. • Case 4 had an MOU in place which outlines sharing of information and data, as well as joint invitations to Head Start/LEA related events, and meeting to plan transition events and activities jointly.	• The majority of transition-related strategies and practices were coordinated and facilitated by Head Start side and focused on engaging families (completing transition forms for K teachers on individual students, family home visits, parent goal survey, family engagement calendar and events, summer activities and information about K, newsletters and support for K registration). • The LEA hosted principal-family meetings, had an open night for parents to meet K teachers and a back-to-school night once school started. K teachers informed parents about what children/families will need to do before transitioning into K. • Head Start and the LEA both engaged in activities (sometimes together) around transitions, such as a shared library event, media and messaging around transition supports for parents (videos, app), and onsite kindergarten registration support in Head Start buildings.	• Head Start and LEA preschool staff participated in some shared professional development, such as training in Conscious Discipline, but these trainings were not transition focused. • There were no joint Head Start to K professional development opportunities.

Perspectives	Policies	Practices	Professional Supports
CASE 5			
• Participants had different perspectives on the timeline of the transition process and defined this period with different levels of specificity, with most focusing on the beginning milestones. • Participants varied in how they operationalized a successful transition from Head Start to kindergarten. • Most participants defined transition success in terms of what it meant for supporting families and children. • Some participants also mentioned specific teacher and systems-level outcomes based on their roles.	• Participants talked about written policies like MOUs and job descriptions that specifically mention kindergarten transition activities and responsibilities. • Overall, however, there did not appear to be any other written policies to help guide transition efforts in Case 5. • Site 5 Head Start's transition activities are guided by the HSPPS and the state pre-k program guidelines. • Site 5 Head Start participants stated explicitly that they do not create transition policies beyond those that exist in the requirements to which they're held accountable.	• Case 5 participants described transition practices on both the Head Start and LEA sides that support children and families as they move from Head Start to kindergarten. • Head Start staff (primarily family liaisons) do home visits, host family workshops, support families during K registration, and have family-teacher conferences. • Elementary schools hosted events meant to welcome and involve the family in their new school community, including orientation night and family events. K teachers meet with families— the elementary school has a Family Center. • The main joint transition practice was the cross-system data exchange facilitated by the intermediary organization.	• The intermediary organization hosts professional development opportunities for Head Start and LEA staff, though these trainings are not transition-related. • Head Start and preschool teachers do receive some transition-related coaching from the intermediary organization.

How Findings “Align” with Existing Research and Theory

This study was the first to deeply explore approaches to kindergarten transitions from two systems that straddle that transition period—Head Start and K-12. By exploring existing partnerships, we were able to collect data from numerous members of the educational community within a specific locale to understand the similarities and differences in approaches to kindergarten transitions that emerged both within systems—but across levels—and across those two systems. This offers an opportunity to better recognize alignment in perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices (i.e., the 4Ps) within and across Head Start and K-12 systems in these communities. We present findings from across the 4Ps as well as what we learned in terms of the role of partnerships and relationships, and the contextual factors that facilitate or create challenges for supporting transitions from Head Start to kindergarten.

Our findings across the 4Ps were consistent with existing research, particularly as summarized in Ehrlich et al. (2021). For example, the notion that staff perspectives can significantly be driven by policies, standards, and expectations within their respective systems is not new. However, our research yielded more insights into the specific factors that influence how locales can create successful alignment. We also identified areas where practice seems to be lacking (e.g., providing joint professional supports) or not coordinated across the systems.

What Might Influence Perspectives?

Findings from this comparative case study indicate that participants’ perspectives—on the timing of transitions, their role in supporting transitions, and their understanding of kindergarten readiness—were influenced by their interactions with children and families. For example, teachers—in both systems—were more likely to identify a concrete starting point for when transitions began (e.g., the year prior to kindergarten, when children enter Head Start) and/or an end point. Whereas administrators and managers/coordinators talked about the transition as being much more fluid, always an ongoing process.

Another example of the connection between perspectives and participants’ roles they play is evidenced by their beliefs regarding classroom practices and kindergarten readiness. Both Head Start and K-12 participants referenced differences in preschool vs. kindergarten—whereby Head Start focused more on developmentally appropriate practices [Head Start for School Readiness Act (2007); HSPPS (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016)] including a focus on whole-child development, while kindergarten staff focused more on specific skills required to meet Common Core

standards. The HSPPS drives the approach that Head Start staff take in supporting children's development *and* working closely with families to understand their goals for their children (and themselves). On the other hand, states have K-12 standards (largely focused on literacy and math skills), which influence school leaders' expectations for what children should be learning in kindergarten and teachers' beliefs about what is most important to focus on instructionally. These different sets of policies influence perspectives, which is one association highlighted in the HS2K theory of change.

What May Support More Aligned Perspectives?

The HS2K review of the existing knowledge base found there was limited research on the types of contextual factors that could help align perspectives across Head Start and K-12 systems. Indeed, recent research highlights the difficulty in aligning perspectives when bringing together staff from very different systems (Stein & Coburn, 2023). That said, hypotheses suggested that if we could achieve better aligned perspectives, educators would be in a better position to support positive transitions for children and families (Ehrlich et al., 2021). Some suggested ways to create more aligned perspectives included strategies that foster increased communication between Head Start and kindergarten teachers such as visits to each other's classrooms, in-person meetings (Cook et al., 2019), shared professional development (Emfinger, 2012; Loewenberg, 2018; Spillane et al., 2018; Valentino & Stipek, 2016), and co-location of ECE within schools (Little, 2020; McCabe & Sipple, 2011; Purtell et al., 2019).

Although one of the suggested approaches to aligning perspectives is to increase joint professional learning opportunities, across our five Cases we found limited evidence that those types of cross-system professional supports were occurring. Our Cases included existing partnerships between Head Start and LEAs and even in that "better than average" situation, little work was done to bring together Head Start and kindergarten educators. We, therefore, come away from this study without systematically understanding whether joint professional development would—or *could*—help to overcome the different perspectives that staff in these two systems hold. This is a continued area for future research and practice efforts.

Co-location did emerge as a potential factor in facilitating more communication between Head Start and kindergarten staff which, in turn, could lead to more alignment of perspectives (and practices) across systems. Being in the same building promoted more relationship building and more informal discussions that participants described as helping them better understand the expectations and practices in the "other" system. This is something that had not been explicitly included in the HS2K theory of change but could be included as an example of an alignment factor—one that can help influence cross-system coordination and collaboration. While co-location may help facilitate more communication and stronger relationships, decisions about facilities are made based on

financial considerations, space availability, and other reasons; therefore, co-location for relationship-building purposes is unlikely.

How Might Policies Influence Other Ps?

Through participants sharing their own perspectives, our case studies provide more concrete evidence (than prior studies) that policies can contribute to staff becoming more aligned in their perspectives and expectations.

Standards and codified expectations help to promote educators' views on their roles, what children should be learning, how staff should support children and families, and what role others (parents, local community, other partners) play in those processes. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that policies are currently driving professional supports (as noted prior) or that staff consider policies as explicitly driving practices that Head Start and LEA educators implement.

In many ways, case study findings mirrored what the HS2K study team found when studying MOUs between Head Start programs and LEAs (Cook et al., 2022)—that policies are currently not utilized to their fullest potential. First, while leaders within each system (e.g., Head Start grantee director, LEA superintendent) could reference policies that might relate to supporting kindergarten transitions, teachers and, in some instances, other school staff were much less likely to be able to identify guidance on how to support transitions. That said, several Head Start and LEA administrators reflected on how MOUs helped to promote cross-system efforts to create partnerships (most commonly at the leadership level), but that more concrete codification of policies could move the needle on cross-system collaboration efforts at the practice level, especially efforts that specifically support kindergarten transition work.

To What Extent were There Coordinated Transition Practices Inclusive of Joint Planning Across Systems?

While both Head Start and K-12 had various transition practices, coordinated or collaborative practices were rare. Our case study findings on the types of practices of Head Start and K-12 largely echo other research in the field (for a review, see Ehrlich et al., 2021). Individual practices on both sides included data and information sharing with elementary staff and families on the Head Start side and sharing information with families on the LEA side. Joint practices included co-hosting kindergarten transition events and/or open houses at elementary schools. Consistent with other research, truly coordinated and collaborative practices were rare. In our review of the knowledge base (Ehrlich et al., 2021), we found that practices that involve connections across systems were much less prevalent than those within systems and that an absence of connection and communication can prohibit creating those joint opportunities (e.g., Purtell et al., 2019). Within our cases, we saw similar findings—even when there was co-location of

Head Start programs within schools, we heard little about co-developed and joint practices occurring between Head Start and kindergarten. Some exceptions included Head Start and LEA staff jointly creating videos for families in Case 4. While these coordinated practices are promising, most were initiated by either Head Start or the LEA and the other party was merely invited to participate (e.g., one system hosting a transition-related event and inviting the other system to join) rather than co-constructed.

Joint planning takes time and intentionality and, overall, we did not find many practices that included planning across systems. This level of collaboration may need added supports such as resources, joint planning time, and combined professional development focused on transitions (which we found to be lacking both within and across Head Start and LEAs). Additionally, policies are needed that can support these structures such as written responsibilities outlined in an MOU that are implemented and followed by Head Start and elementary school staff. While not sufficient in and of itself, some findings did indicate that co-location may help facilitate this type of collaboration. Overall, Head Start and LEA practices seem more aligned when the programs were co-located in the same building, offering ease of both formal and informal communication that could occur prior to, during, and after the kindergarten transition. It is also possible that co-located programs already have other structures in place, such as similar schedules, leadership, and school/building-level policies and practices that are conducive to collaborative planning.

How Did Partnerships Support Efforts Towards Creating More Cross-system Alignment?

In the Cases that had blended classrooms (Head Start students with other funded preschool students), when asked about cross-system efforts or alignment, staff were much more likely to think about the horizontal alignment between Head Start and the LEA *at the preschool level.* In other words, how Head Start staff were working collaboratively with preschool staff situated within the elementary school(s) or how leaders were working to align language, expectations, curricula, and assessment between Head Start and school-based (often state-funded) pre-k. There was much less discussion—or indication of active efforts—occurring between Head Start and kindergarten staff. Thus, the relationships formed between Head Start programs and LEAs seemed to prioritize connections among different preschool programs—a form of horizontal (within-grade) alignment. While those working in practice may not be surprised by this finding, it has not been highlighted in prior research and is an important contribution to our understanding of alignment efforts.

There was some evidence—particularly in Cases 1 and 5—of vertical alignment efforts between Head Start and kindergarten staff. In Case 5, higher level (state) policies prompted alignment of assessments between preschool and kindergarten as well as the

sharing of data between the two grades (see Case Example "Systematizing Practices" in **Chapter 4**). In fact, in this Case, there was both horizonal alignment—whereby Head Start programs and school-based pre-k were on the same page about curriculum and assessment—and vertical alignment efforts between all of those ECE programs and kindergarten. As such, *because* there were alignment efforts in place between the multiple ECE programs, when data were shared with kindergarten staff, they received more consistent information from the various ECE programs that children were exiting.

However, in several of the cases, alignment efforts between Head Start and kindergarten (within the K-12 system; or vertical alignment) were more articulated and operationalized at the leadership and staff levels and less so at the teacher level. This may be due to teachers' schedules; they have less time to collaborate and coordinate because their primary responsibility is to oversee and run their classrooms. In addition, collaboration can be challenging if teacher prep times are not aligned. Most kindergarten teachers do not have classroom aides and, therefore, cannot leave their classroom any time other than prep periods. Staff shortages also prohibit Head Start teachers from leaving their classrooms, given staff-to-child ratio requirements. Thus, alignment efforts between two systems—Head Start and K-12—must be created and maintained at the systems level. This may be why we heard more about the Cases having collaborative structures in place only with staff who oversaw broader K-12 systems such as the superintendent, school principals, other school staff, and—less frequently—kindergarten teachers themselves. However, Head Start and kindergarten teachers both expressed wanting more alignment with each other and talked about having benefitted from the efforts made at the systems level to align frameworks, curriculum, assessments, and practices.

Overall, the HS2K theory of change was intended to focus on shared approaches (perspectives, policies, professional supports) and coordinated practices that represent connections between Head Start (or other ECE programs) and kindergarten. That is still the vision—to best support children and families through that transition to kindergarten requires vertical coordination. However, our case studies suggest that it may be happening infrequently, particularly given that our cases were intended to represent scenarios where Head Start programs and LEAs were *best* set up to have that type of coordination.

How Did Case Study Participants Define "Outcomes" of Successful Transitions?

Prior research has largely focused on child- and sometimes family-level outcomes of successful transitions to kindergarten. For example, practices that engage families have been found to be associated with children's positive adjustment to kindergarten and better academic outcomes in kindergarten (Cook & Coley, 2017; Schulting et al., 2005).

In this case study, we heard directly from staff at multiple levels within both systems regarding what they considered to be the perceived outcomes of "successful" kindergarten transitions. At the child level, findings were as expected and included an emphasis on kindergarten readiness (both academic and social-emotional) and an understanding of kindergarten expectations and procedures.

Family outcomes were heavily emphasized by case study participants in both Head Start programs and LEAs. Participants from both systems spoke of wanting families to feel welcomed and supported throughout the transition. Perhaps more than in prior research, LEA participants focused on families feeling connected, safe, and involved in the transition. This could be for a variety of reasons such as staff wanting to make sure in-person connections resumed after Covid-19 shutdowns. LEA staff, more so than Head Start staff, were also focused on wanting to make sure families had a clear understanding of what it means to be kindergarten ready and how kindergarten environments differed from Head Start environments. Both Head Start staff, including family services staff, and LEA participants also emphasized having good connections and open communication between teachers and families as a positive outcome of transitions.

The HS2K team's published review (Ehrlich et al., 2021) included a list of potential outcomes—at the teacher, family, and child level—based on existing literature and theory. In our Cases, where there were existing cross-system partnerships in place, we heard little about some of the individual teacher outcomes from prior research (e.g., increased self-efficacy, increased implementation of evidence-based transition practices, decreased stress levels). On the other hand, participants at multiple levels of the systems did highlight key outcomes for educators as being focused on **cross-system relationships**. For example, a prominent outcome noted by case study participants was strong collaboration and communication systems across teacher and center/school-level staff.

Consistent with these viewpoints, existing research suggests that the most effective approaches in supporting kindergarten transitions are those that are relationship-based, fostering connections and collaborations across staff from different systems and between systems and families. Importantly, this comparative case study adds to the knowledge base by placing a strong emphasis on these partnerships—and the struggles in creating them—that seem critical to developing cross-system alignment. Indeed, prior literature suggests that relationships are a significant mechanism through which each of the 4Ps might lead to stronger family and child outcomes.

How This Study Informs the HS2K Theory of Change

What Aspects of the Existing HS2K Theory of Change were Supported in These Case Studies?

The case study findings supported many aspects of the HS2K theory of change. Furthermore, the findings provided some concrete examples of how the theory of change played out within different Head Start-LEA partnerships and their individual contexts.

All 4Ps Matter!

Overall, we found that the 4Ps may be intricately tied to each other, with bi/multi-directional influences on each other. Specifically, the 4Ps are complementary and each has the capacity to strengthen the other Ps. For example, a practice that leads to more aligned perspectives may be more sustainable, or reach more families, if it is written into policy and if educators have the professional supports (and resources) to implement it over time. Relatedly, one P cannot—in and of itself—result in the desired outcome of successful transitions. For example, in our Cases, policies were as such inadequate to create shared approaches to supporting transitions, but they did serve to create opportunities for people to articulate a shared vision, create structures for meeting and working together, and build relationships to align practice and perspectives.

We found that without having shared (or at least aligned) policies, professional supports, and perspectives, it is more difficult to have *truly* coordinated transition practices in a systemic way. We saw evidence of two-sided transition practices, but only in few instances were the two systems really coordinated at the teacher level with joint planning and developing those practices and supports. On the other hand, all of our Cases were dedicated to creating a better transition experience for children and families, and their efforts were supported by different Ps—and implemented at different levels of the systems—across the five Cases. In reality, it likely requires focusing on one or two Ps first, and then strengthening the remaining Ps.

Relationships a Key Factor

As discussed above, relationships were a key lever in strengthening partnerships and implementing transition approaches more consistently. Our findings add to the existing literature by gaining a deeper understanding of what the partnerships across systems look like, how they are formed based on individual relationships among staff at different levels within the Head Start and K-12 systems, and how they approach transitions separately and together. We add to this literature by exploring the mechanisms of these

partnerships including how long they have been in existence, who is involved, what the meeting structures are, and what is informal versus formalized into policy. The need for strong relationships is implicit in the HS2K theory of change and articulated as an alignment factor. Our case study findings support this and suggest that relationships may be even more central to the creation of shared or aligned "Ps" than is articulated in the current theory of change visual (**Figure 3**).

The Diverse Roles of Intermediaries and Community Partners

There is very little existing evidence on how organizations and entities (represented in the outer ring of the theory of change) may play a role in transition approaches and the relationships between Head Start programs and LEAs. The case studies shed some light on the roles of these types of organizations including states and their policies, local government, and community partners (e.g., museums, libraries) that vary across community contexts.

Leadership at All Levels

Recent theory and research suggest that classroom-level early childhood staff can be empowered to make changes to their practices and by doing so demonstrate agency and leadership (Douglass, Kirby, & Malone, 2023; Kirby et al., 2020). Other studies show that sharing power and decision-making across ECE administrators and front-line staff can lead to more sustainable changes in practice (e.g., Arbour et al. 2016; Derrick-Mills et al. 2014; Sims & Waniganayake 2015; Spillane et al., 2001; Wang & Ho, 2018). In this case study, leadership at all levels emerged as a critical element for initiating and sustaining partnerships to support transitions. Leaders are key, not only in establishing partnerships, but also in setting the partnership vision and goals and in communicating roles and responsibilities, as well as ensuring resources are available for transition-related strategies and practices. Across all of our Cases, we found that leadership mattered—and at all levels. In each of the cases, for instance, there was strong commitment and buy-in for the partnership at the Head Start grantee and school district levels. Head Start Directors and district superintendents often initiated or codified the partnership via MOUs and/or by making it clear what each of the two systems brings to the partnership, including roles and responsibilities. Leaders at all levels also were tasked with maintaining system-level relationships that are critical for sustaining strong partnerships and creating buy-in for those alliances. Leadership also mattered at the building levels, including the Head Start Center Director, Head Start Manager/coordinator, and school principals and other administrators. For instance, school building leaders were involved in supporting transition efforts by creating structures and supports, such as time and resources, for staff and teachers to collaborate and coordinate transition-related events, share data, and have conversations with families to assist with the "warm hand off." Leaders also initiated

conversations and efforts to align the two systems to ease transitions for children and families.

What Aspects of the HS2K Theory of Change Could Be Revised Based on These Case Studies?

Future versions of the theory of change could be more explicit about the importance of leadership and relationships—key facilitators of partnerships, which may be *assumed* under all of the coordinated and shared Ps. Our findings suggest that it is nearly impossible to strengthen shared Ps (represented in the middle part of the theory of change visual) without supportive leadership and strong relationships, and in the future, it may be necessary to highlight these factors in a more direct way.

In addition, collaboration and communication among teachers and staff was discussed in our case studies as a key perceived outcome of successful transition processes. This is an area to explore further in the future and could potentially be added as an outcome for teachers and school staff within the theory of change.

Implications for Policy & Practice

While providing an in-depth descriptive look at transitions within five cases, our study findings highlight the diverse approaches to partnerships and transition perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices. We highlight those differences throughout the report but also note similarities. Understanding that communities are in very different places with their partnerships and approaches, we provide the following implications for policy and practice rooted in our findings.

Head Start-LEA Partnerships Started Their Work in Different Places

Some of the cases in this study had longstanding relationships, while others were newer. Some had existing relationships primarily focused on special education or horizontal alignment with district preschool programs, but little focus on transitions. Some cases had MOUs that were used to inform practices, and in other cases most participants did not know much about the contents of their MOUs. However, there is something to be learned from each of these cases; no one partnership had it all figured out, and that is likely to be true of many partnerships in practice. Case study partners worked to build upon the strengths they each had. For example, in one of our cases, a Head Start program had a good relationship with a special education coordinator at the LEA, and they worked within that relationship to build more connections around transitions. In another example, individuals implementing transition supports did not know the content of existing the MOUs, but believed they could have been better

informed if there had been efforts to bring together staff to review and revise the document across Head Start and LEA partners. In yet another example, there was a strong community partner in the local library. Engaging in activities at that site helped to bridge the LEA and Head Start program and supported relationship building. Although community partners and intermediaries may look different in each community, our study identified examples of how they can play an important role in strengthening relationships across systems. Altogether, this suggests that there is no single roadmap for how partnerships should build their relationships and strengthen the 4Ps; they started with what they had in place.

Head Start-LEA Partners Invested in Activities Aimed at Building and Sustaining Relationships

Across our cases and throughout the existing literature (Ehrlich et al., 2021), it is clear that relationships matter. Relationships also take time and effort to cultivate and maintain. We found that opportunities for more connections and communication helped with relationship building. In some of the cases included in this study, physical co-location of Head Start programs within public school buildings helped nurture those relationships. However, case study participants mentioned other ways to build and sustain relationships as well: planned and ongoing opportunities to meet and discuss curricula and programming, visits to each other's classrooms, and meetings to discuss specific students' needs. These all were described as helping to build relationships, which are necessary to align perspectives and support joint practices. An important implication of this study is that Head Start staff and kindergarten staff—at the classroom up to the leadership levels—need ample opportunities to connect and communicate with one another in shared spaces.

Shared Professional Supports and Joint Planning Opportunities Across Head Start and K-12 are Still a Work in Progress

Although we found many instances of aligned professional activities across Head Start and K-12 settings within locales, we did not find any instances of shared professional supports within our cases. Based on our prior review of the existing literature base (Ehrlich et al., 2021), this seems like a promising area for policy makers and educational administrators to explore. Increasing opportunities and incentives for shared trainings that focus on transitions might in turn help with the development of relationships across systems.

Many Approaches to Partnerships and Supporting Kindergarten Transitions were Not Written into Policy

Relationships are necessary to support successful transition approaches; however they are subject to break down over time when people leave positions or change jobs. For example, one superintendent discussed the anticipated challenges with continuing with the partnership with Head Start and their joint support of transitions once he retires. In another case, participants discussed the importance of formalizing approaches to kindergarten transition and opportunities in MOUs and other policy documents to make transition supports systematic. Some participants suggested that including more transition-specific language within policies and procedures may help support the continuation of transition practices and policies as new staff come on-board. This may also help support clarification of roles and responsibilities across the two systems so that efforts may carry forward during periods of staff turnover and changes in leadership.

How Can Future Research Continue to Address Gaps in our Knowledge on Kindergarten Transitions?

Our study reveals several areas for further research. First, future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of places where true vertical alignment is occurring between Head Start (or other ECE programs) and kindergarten grades. This would enable the field to gain a better awareness of how the 4Ps may be shared or aligned in those locales.

In addition, it would be valuable to investigate whether there are locales with more prevalent cross-system/joint professional supports that bring together leaders or classroom staff that serve both preschool and kindergarten students. If so, do these experiences lead to smoother transitions and better outcomes for children, families, and educators?

Future research could also explore whether and how policies with more articulated transition practices and strategies have better implementation of those practices and strategies as well as better outcomes for children and families. For example, Case 4 provided examples of policy-specified, agreed-upon practices to support cross-system supports of kindergarten transitions. However, it is unclear whether the practices as listed (which in and of itself was rare in our Cases) are actually being implemented (and to what degree).

Furthermore, we did not find any locales in our study that had a combination of aligned policies, professional supports, or perspectives around kindergarten transition across Head Start and K-12 systems. Although our theory of change posits that these three factors are necessary to facilitate coordinated transition practices, the evidence did not permit us to test this critical centerpiece of the HS2K theory of change. Future research on a larger sample of sites may permit a more thorough examination of these relationships.

Given that intermediaries and community partners played important (but different) roles in most of our cases, more research is needed to understand these roles and how they facilitate cross-system relationships and/or play other roles in community transition processes. The role of community partners has been largely absent from previous literature on transitions, and future research could dig deeper into the distinct roles they play across different communities.

Finally, this case study provides a qualitative descriptive look at five communities. Building off of this study, future research should consider larger sample sizes that can provide a national examination of transition approaches within and across communities.

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Appendix A: Additional Information on Recruitment Process

Recruitment of Cases

- COVID impacted the research team's original recruitment and data collection timeline. Our original plan was to begin soliciting nominations in late 2020, with recruitment happening in March 2021 and data collection occurring between April and June 2021. We also planned to do follow up interviews with kindergarten parents/primary caregivers between October-November 2021. However, our recruitment and data collection efforts were delayed because of the shutdowns and restrictions on research put in place by many Head Start centers and elementary schools because of the COVID pandemic. OPRE revised the timeline so that data collection happened in 2022 rather than 2021. Actual recruitment began in February 2022 and lasted through May. Data collection occurred between April and September 2022. Follow up interviews with kindergarten parents began in December 2022 and continued into January 2023.
- We began by reaching out to the Head Start program contact listed in the nomination to the first set of six sites we identified.
- We set up an initial meeting to gather site-specific information, share information about our study, and answer any questions potential participants had about the study. Outreach also included a project overview with details on the broader HS2K study.
- During these initial meetings, we gauged interest in participating in the study and asked for written confirmation if their team agreed to move forward. .
- Initial outreach emphasized that in order to participate it was necessary to secure engagement and commitment from *both* their Head Start program and a partner Local Education Agency (LEA).

We set up a second meeting with the other side of the system (either Head Start or LEA) to gauge interest in the study. For one of the cases, it was necessary to also go through the district's Institutional Review Board approval process before beginning data collection.

Recruitment of Staff Within Case Study Sites

- After recruitment of cases and individual sites, we sent a template for site leaders to fill out with names, positions/roles and titles, and email contact information. We used that to invite each person on those lists with a link to book an interview.
- We used Microsoft Bookings to provide available times to select from for each participant. Because interview times varied by staff role, Bookings enabled the research team to make their availability known and to pre-set the length of the interview.

Appendix B: Final Codebooks

Table B-1 includes the codes used for the qualitative analysis of family focus groups discussing the transition process. It addresses parent perceptions regarding the transition process, support and information received, and by whom, and educator-driven transition activities. There are codes to identify transition-based experiences, whether information received was consistent across sources, the parent's perceptions regarding their child's readiness for the transition, and who the parent engaged with regarding the transition process. Codes were also used to identify home activities that families engaged in to support their child's transition, as well as whether they met with the kindergarten teacher, visited the kindergarten classroom, and/or if classrooms prior to kindergarten resembled a kindergarten classroom. In addition, general challenges, successes, areas for improvement, and changes over time were noted.

Below is the list of parent codes, child codes, and grandchild codes for family focus groups discussing the transition process. There are 41 parent codes, 34 child codes, and 0 grandchild codes. Child codes and grandchild codes are nested under the parent codes. Brief definitions are provided for each code.

Table B-1. Family Focus Groups Codebook

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code (N/A for Family Focus Groups)	Definition
FG_Trans_1stChild			Parent report of whether first experience of child transition to K
Trans_SuccessDef			Successful transition to K
	Child		Meaning of a successful transition to K for children
	Family		Meaning of a successful transition to K for families
	Teacher		Meaning of a successful transition to K for teachers
	Head Start		Head Start definition of success for transition
	School		School-based definition of success for transition

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code (N/A for Family Focus Groups)	Definition
	Perceptions of child readiness		Perceptions of child readiness for transition
FG_Trans_ExcitedChild			Parent perception of what child will be most excited about regarding transition to K
FG_Trans_ExcitedParent			Parent perception of parent/family member is most excited about
FG_Trans_Concern			Description of parent concerns about transition to K
	Access2Schools		Parent is concerned about access to preferred schools
	SuppEnv		Supportive environment that meets child's developmental needs (inclusion)
	LangCultResp		Responsiveness of different school options to families' language and cultural origins
FG_Trans_SupportWho			Description of who parent talks to about transition to K
	Teacher		Parent talks to Teacher
	Relative		Parent talks to Relative
	Center staff		Parent talks to Center staff
	Other		Parent talks to Other
FG_Trans_SupportTopics			Description of transition topic(s) parent discusses with teacher, relative, center staff
FG_Trans_SupportFreq			Parent report of frequency of parent and Head Start teacher discussion about transition to K (example)
FG_Trans_SupportHelpful			Parent perception of what is helpful about these discussions with Head Start teacher
FG_Trans_SupportNotHelpful			Parent perception of what is not helpful about these discussions with Head Start teacher
FG_Trans_Support_InfoShared			Parent report of Information shared by Head Start teacher with parent
	Newsletters		Newsletters shared with parent

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code (N/A for Family Focus Groups)	Definition
	Emails		Emails shared with parents
	Social media		Social media shared with parent
	Other		Other information shared with parent
FG_Trans_Support			Parent report of ways Head Start teachers or other staff talk with parent about goals or needs
FG_Trans_SupportDiscHelpful			Parent perception of whether conversations are helpful for preparing child for K
FG_Trans_SupportHomeInfoActivity			Parent report of information shared by Head Start teacher with parent about home-based activities
FG_Trans_SupportHomeInfoActivityTypes			Parent description of types of activities Head Start staff recommended
FG_Trans_SupportHomeInfoActivityUse			Parent report about using information or conducting activities (example)
FG_Trans_SupportHomeInfoActivityNotUse			Parent report about why did not use information or conduct activities
FG_FG_Trans_ParentActivity			Parent report of actions to help child prepare
FG_Trans_ParentActivityShared			Parent report about discussing/sharing home-based transition-related activities with Head Start teacher or other staff
FG_Trans_ParentActivityOtherFamily			Parent report about being involved with other families in transition activities
FG_FG_Trans_OtherSupport			Parent report about others who provides supports to parent and child on the transition to K
	K Teacher		K Teacher supports parent
	ESStaff		Elementary School Staff supports parent
	FSS		Family Support Specialist supports parent

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code (N/A for Family Focus Groups)	Definition
	OtherStaff		Other staff support parent
	SpecEdTeacher		Special education teacher and/or advocates support parent
	Ped		Pediatrician supports parents
	FamFriendNeighbor		Family, friends, or neighbors supports parents
	OtherCmmtyOrg		Other community agency/organization(s) support parent
FG_Trans_InfoConsistent			Parent report about whether information about kindergarten transitions from different people is consistent or differs
FG_Trans_InfoDiffers			Parent report about how information differs
FG_Trans_InfoHelpful			Parent perception about what information is most helpful
FG_Trans_InfoNotHelpful			Parent perception about what information is not helpful
FG_Trans_HelpParenChild Prepare			Parent report of ways Head Start teachers or staff help parent and child prepare for transition to K
	Met with K teacher		Parent met K teacher
	Visit ES/K classroom		Set up a visit to elementary school/k classroom
	K-likeClassroom		Classroom set up like K
FG_Trans_ActivityKStaff			Parent report about activities K teacher or school has done to prepare parent and child for transition to K
	MetFam		Met with family (in person or virtually)
	ParentsShareInfo		Asked parents to share information about child
	ActivitiesFamChildMeet		Organized activities for families/children to meet each other (in person or virtually)
	Other		Other

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code (N/A for Family Focus Groups)	Definition
FG_Trans_ActivityHelpful			Parent perception about which activities have been most helpful in preparing child for K
	Trans_ActivityHowHelpChild		Parent perception of how activities helped child
	Trans_ActivityHowHelpParent		Parent perception of how activities helped parent
FG_Trans_ActivityNotHelpful			Parent perception of types of activities that parent did not find helpful
FG_Trans_ActivityNotHelpfulReason			Parent perception of why activities were not helpful
FG_Trans_PrepDoneDifferentlyHeadStart			Parent perception of what Head Start program might have done differently to support child's transition to K
FG_Trans_PrepDoneDifferentlyK			Parent perception of what child's upcoming K teacher might have done differently to support child's transition to K
FG_Trans_ParentPercPrepared			Parent perception of how prepared parent feels about child's transition to K
FG_Trans_ChildPrepared			Parent perception of how prepared the child is to transition to K
FG_Trans_ChildPreparedReason			Parent perception of reason child is prepared
FG_Trans_ChildNotPreparedReason			Parent perception of reason child is not prepared
OTHER			Use for excerpts that present information that may have relevance
OTHER_AREA_IMPROVE			Head Start or LEA reflections or recommendations about what could be improved or done differently
OTHER_Challenge			Any description of challenges experienced
OTHER_Success			Any description of successes experienced

Table B-2 includes the codes used for the qualitative analysis of perspectives of the transition process. It addresses examples of transition success, how transition success is defined, and definitions for specific stakeholders, such as children, families, and teachers. Codes are available for transition supports, information shared, and supports provided for specific stakeholders, including children. Codes are available to specify supports for children who have exposure to trauma, special needs, cultural and linguistic diversity, and whose families are involved in child welfare. Perceptions of the transition timeframe, training provided, and to whom, roles and responsibilities related to transitions, and organizational barriers are captured. In addition, other general successes, challenges, areas for improvement, changes over time, and related descriptions are captured with specified codes.

Below is the list of parent codes, child codes, and grandchild codes for transition. There are 21 parent codes, 26 child codes, and 4 grandchild codes. Child codes and grandchild codes are nested under the parent codes. Brief definitions are provided for each code.

Table B-2. Transition Codebook

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition of Parent Code
Trans_Success			A description of transition success
Trans_SuccessDef			Successful transition to K
	Child		Meaning of a successful transition to K for children
	Family		Meaning of a successful transition to K for families
	Teacher		Meaning of a successful transition to K for teachers
	Head Start		Head Start definition of transition success
	School		School-based definition of success for transition
	Perceptions of child readiness		Perceptions of child readiness for transition
Trans_SupplInternal			Transition supports provided internally
Trans_Support_InfoShared			Description of information shared by HS or ES teacher with parent
Trans_SupportProvide			Description of supports provided by agency/district for transitions

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition of Parent Code
	Director		(for) Director
	Principal		(for) Principals
	Teacher		(for) Teachers
	Family		(for) Family
	Children		(for) Children
		Trauma	Supports for children exposed to trauma
		SpecNeeds	Supports for children with special education needs
		CultLang	Supports for children with cultural and linguistic diversity
		Cwinv	Supports for children who are welfare involved
Trans_Timeframe			Period of time when participant considers the transition from HS to K to begin and end
Trans_TrainingProvide			Description of types of training provided by agency/district to support transitions
	Director		(for) Director
	Principal		(for) Principals
	Teacher		(for) Teachers
	Child		(for) Children
	Family		(for) Family
Trans_OTHER			Use for excerpts that present information that may have relevance to transitions or site context
	Non-Trans_TrainPD		Description of non-transition related training or professional development for Head Start or LEA staff
COVID_UseFundsTrans			Description of use of COVID-19 funding to support transition
COVID_ImpTransPract			Description of Implications of COVID-19 on strategies and practices
Trans_RolesResp			Identification of roles and responsibilities in supporting transitions across agency/district

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition of Parent Code
	Director		Director
	Manager/Coordinator		Manager/Coordinator
	Teacher		Teachers
	Family Support Services staff		Family Support Services staff
	Superintendent		Superintendent
	Principal		Principal
	Staff		Staff
	Other		Other
	Other children/students		Other children/students that support children/students with transition experience (e.g., serve as buddies, model behaviors)
Trans_RolesResp_FAM			Description of staff and family perspectives on roles and responsibilities of families during the transition process (advocating for child, navigating public school system, knowing where resources are located, DLL resources, etc.)
Trans_ORGBARR			Description of organizational-specific barriers on the Head Start or LEA level to support transitions
Trans_AREA_IMPROVE			Head Start or LEA reflections or recommendations about what could be improved or done differently specific to transitions
Trans_CHALLENGE			Any description of challenges experienced with transitions
Trans_Fam_CHALLENGE			Family challenges with transition
OTHER			Use for excerpts that present information that may have relevance
OTHER_AREA_IMPROVE			Head Start or LEA reflections or recommendations about what could be improved or done differently
OTHER_Challenge			Any description of challenges experienced
OTHER_Success			Any description of successes experienced

Table B-3 includes the codes used for the qualitative analysis of family engagement in the transition process. It addresses the methods used for engagement, and by whom, and strategies used to reach hard to engage parents or families. There are codes to identify the benefits of families' efforts to help their child prepare for kindergarten, and the challenges families face in preparing their child. Codes also reference challenges experienced by specific populations, including culturally and linguistically diverse children and families, child-welfare involved families, families exposed to trauma, children with special needs, and other challenges. Additional codes address the perspectives of Head Start staff and LEA/district staff on what families can do to help their children transition from Head Start to kindergarten. Additional codes address changes to family engagement methods because of the COVID-19 pandemic, overall challenges and successes, and areas for improvement.

Below is the list of parent codes, child codes, and grandchild codes for family engagement in the transition process. There are nine parent codes, eight child codes, and five grandchild codes. Child codes and grandchild codes are nested under the parent codes. Brief definitions are provided for each code.

Table B-3. Family Engagement in Transition Process Codebook

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition
FAM_ENG			Description of process of building relationships with families, to include efforts to: 1) build positive and goal-oriented relationships with families, children, and early childhood professionals; 2) culturally and linguistically responsive relationship building with key family members in a child's life; and 3) creating and sustaining an ongoing partnership that supports family well-being.
	FAMENG_Methods		Description of ways agency/district involve or engage with families on HS2K transition
	FAMENG_StrategiesH2R		Description of strategies used to engage hard to reach parents/families
	FAMENG_Benefits		Description of benefits of families' efforts to help their child prepare for the kindergarten transition
	FAMENG_Challenges		Description of challenges families face in preparing their child for the kindergarten transition
	FAMENG_SpecPops		Use to note if special populations experience challenges

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition
		CultLang	Description of challenges faced by children and families regarding cultural and linguistic diversity
		CWinv	Description of challenges faced by children and families that are child-welfare involved
		Trauma	Description of challenges faced by children and families that have been exposed to trauma
		SpecEd	Description of challenges faced by children and families with special education needs
		Other	Description of challenges faced by children and families with [other] needs/concerns
	FAMENG_TRANSACT_BENEFIT		Description of whether certain families benefit from transition activities more than others
	FAMENG_TRANSACT_NOBENEFIT		Description of whether certain families don't benefit from transition activities compared to others
	COVID_ChangesFamEng		Description of changes in how agency/district involves or engages with families during HS2k transition in response to COVID-19
FAM_HowSupportHS2K			Perspectives of Head Start and LEA/district staff on what families can do to help their children transition from Head Start to Kindergarten
FAMENG_Challenge			Any description of challenges experienced related to family engagement
FAMENG_Success			Any description of successes related to family engagement
OTHER			Use for excerpts that present information that may have relevance
OTHER_AREA_IMPROVE			HS or LEA reflections or recommendations about what could be improved or done differently
OTHER_Challenge			Any description of challenges experienced
OTHER_Success			Any description of successes experienced

Table B-4 includes the codes used for the qualitative analysis of partnerships in the transition process. It addresses the context of the site related to transition policy and practice, including the number of elementary schools, HS programs, population/community characteristics, and the respondent's background. There are numerous codes to capture information about partnerships, including descriptions of collaboration, activities, funding, characteristics of partnership relationships, successes, challenges, and areas for improvement. In addition, codes are used for effective/useful transition practices and perspectives of positive outcomes.

Below is the list of parent codes, child codes, and grandchild codes for partnerships in the transition process. There are 13 parent codes, 27 child codes, and 1 grandchild code. Child codes and grandchild codes are nested under the parent codes. Brief definitions are provided for each code.

Table B-4. Partnerships Codebook

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition
CONTEXT			Relevant information about the site as it relates to transition policy and practice
	NUM_ChildTrans		Number of different Head Start/districts and schools children in program / schools transitioned to/from this year
	NUM_ES		Number of elementary schools children can transition to. Information provided by Head Start grantee/delegate agency staff only
	NUM_DES; NUM_HS		Identification of number of district/school /Head Start programs children can enroll in
	CaseSite_Yes		Identification of whether district/school/Head Start program are part of the case studies
	Population/Community Characteristics		Description of population or local community served by Head Start or LEA
	Co-location		Whether the Head Start program and K are housed in the same building
	Respondent Background		Description of respondents' background with Head Start or LEA that have a bearing on perspectives about transition

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition
PARTNERSHIP			Description of formalized relationships between Head Start and LEAs to support transitions
	COLLAB_ActivityORG		Description of agency/district staff collaboration
	COLLAB_ActivityStaff		Description of activities across Head Start and district/elementary school staff
		InfoShare	Information sharing
	COLLAB_FundSource		Description of source(s) of funding for collaborative activities
	COLLAB_FundSourceUse		Description of how various funding sources support transition activities
	RELAT_CoordInitatedBy		Identification of party that initiated the relationship
	RELAT_CoordStaffRole		Identification of agency/district staff roles in transitions coordination
	RELAT_Duration		Identification of length of time of staff relationships
	RELAT_Origin		Description of how relationship(s) developed
	COLLAB_OtherHS-DES		Description of how agency/district works with *other* elementary districts/schools/Head Start programs
	COLLAB_OtherHSstaff		Collaboration with other Head Start staff
	COLLAB_OtherLEADistStaff		Collaboration with other LEA district staff
	COVID_TransApproach		Description of ways participants navigated transitions during COVID-19 pandemic with existing relationships
	COVID_ImpactCollab		Description of ways that collaboration between elementary districts/schools / Head Start programs has changed since COVID-19
	COVID_Facilitators		Description of ways in which existing relationships with districts and schools / Head Start programs *help* agency/district navigate transitions during COVID-19 pandemic
	COLLAB_Success		Examples of collaboration successes
	COLLAB_Facilitators		Description of factors that made it easier to collaborate with districts/schools/Head Start programs

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition
	COLLAB_Challenges		Description of factors that made it harder to collaborate with districts/schools/Head Start programs
	COLLAB_AREA_IMPROVE		Discussion of areas for improvement related to collaboration
	COLLAB_ChangesOverTime		Discussion of changes over time related to collaboration
COORD_InitiatedBy			Discussion of who initiated coordination
RELAT_CmmtyPart			Discussion of relationships with community partner(s)
TransPract_MostUseful Effective			Perspectives on transition-related practices that are considered effective and perceptions on why effective
TransPract_PosOutco mes			Perspectives of how practices lead to positive outcomes for teachers, families, and children. Cross-reference with definition of successful kindergarten transition
Trans_WorkCmmtyPart _			Use for references to Head Start/LEA working with community partners to support transitions
	COORD_TransPract_Cmmty Part		Discussion related to coordination of transition practices with community partners
WorkCmmtyPart_NotTr ans			Use for reference to Head Start/LEA working with community partners but not transition related
OTHER			Use for excerpts that present information that may have relevance
OTHER_AREA_IMPRO VE			Head Start or LEA reflections or recommendations about what could be improved or done differently
OTHER_Challenge			Any description of challenges experienced
OTHER_Success			Any description of successes experienced

Table B-5 includes the codes used for the qualitative analysis of how policies inform the transition process. It addresses how federal, state, and local policies influence transition practices or procedures. There are codes for policy implementation at the agency/district level, including a description of ways in which policy fosters collaboration, coordination, information sharing, and professional development. There are codes to capture MOA/MOUs between an agency/district and the topics in an MOA/MOU, such as those related to perspectives, policies, professional supports, and practices. Codes are used for descriptions of data sharing and to capture whether data sharing occurs, the types and methods of data sharing, who collects data, and whether/how data are used. In addition, there are codes for whether there are incentives or sanctions that influence policy and supports needed to implement policies, such as resources, professional supports, and shared visions/values. There are codes to capture challenges, changes over time, successes, areas for improvement, effective policy-driven transition practices, and comments related to funding.

Below is the list of parent codes, child codes, and grandchild codes for policies to inform the transition process. There are 18 parent codes, 23 child codes, and 0 grandchild codes. Child codes and grandchild codes are nested under the parent codes. Brief definitions are provided for each code.

Table B-5. Policies Codebook

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code (N/A for Policies)	Definition
POL_HowInfluence			Description of specific federal, state, or local policies and how they influence transition practices or procedures at Head Start programs/districts or elementary schools
	Fed		Federal
	State		State
	Local		Local
POL_Impl			Policy implementations at agency/district level
	COLLAB_AgencyDistrict		Description of ways in which policy fosters collaboration between Head Start programs/districts or elementary schools

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code (N/A for Policies)	Definition
	COORD_CmmtyPartTrans		Description of ways in which policy fosters coordination with community partners
	InfoShare		Description of ways in which policy fosters information sharing
	ProfDev		Description of ways in which policy fosters professional development
POL_MOU			Response as to whether there is an MOA/MOU between the agency/district
POL_MOU_Topics			Description of topics addressed in the MOU. May also refer to an MOA
	Perspectives		Perspectives
	Policies		Policies
	Professional supports		Professional supports
	Practices		Practices
DataShare			Description of data sharing activity between agency and district, indicating what is shared, how, by whom, and when
	Occurs; Does not occur		Whether data sharing occurs
	Types		Types of data received
	ByWhom		Who collects data
	Methods		How data sharing occurs
	Use_Practice		How data are used (for practice)
	Data_NotUsed		Whether data shared for practice are not being used
POL_Impl_IncSanc			Description of whether any incentives or sanctions influence policy implementation at the agency or district level
POL_ImplSuppNeed			Description of additional supports needed to implement policies

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code (N/A for Policies)	Definition
	Resources		Resources
	Professional Supports		Professional supports
	Shared visions/values		Shared visions/values
	Partners		Partners
	Specific practices and strategies		Specific practices and strategies
	Other policies		Other policies
POL_Challenge			Any description of challenges experienced related to policy
POL_ChangesOverTime			Any descriptions of changes over time related to policy
POL_Success			Any description of successes related to policy
POL_AREA_IMPROVE			Head Start or LEA reflections or recommendations about what could be improved or done differently
POL_TransPract_Most Effective			Discussion related to most effective transition practices aligned with policy
FUNDING			Use for references to or descriptions of any funding source
OTHER			Use for excerpts that present information that may have relevance
OTHER_AREA_IMPROVE			Head Start or LEA reflections or recommendations about what could be improved or done differently
OTHER_Challenge			Any description of challenges experienced
OTHER_Success			Any description of successes experienced

Table B-6 includes the codes used for reflections regarding the transition process. It addresses transition practices the respondent considers to be most useful/important/effective, supports needed to improve and sustain transition efforts, challenges, and successes. There are codes to identify types of support needed, as well as particular needs of specific populations, including culturally and linguistically diverse children and families, child-welfare involved families, families exposed to trauma, and children with special needs. Additional codes address the perspectives of how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted transition experiences, needed supports during this time, and supports that would be useful in the future. Lastly, reflections on areas for improvement and general reflections on the work were captured with specified codes.

Below is the list of parent codes, child codes, and grandchild codes for reflections regarding the transition process. There are 12 parent codes, 4 child codes, and 4 grandchild codes. Child codes and grandchild codes are nested under the parent codes. Brief definitions are provided for each code.

Table B-6. Reflections Codebook

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition
TransPract_MostUsefulEffective			Description of transition practices the participant considers to be most useful/important/effective
TransPract_SuppNeed			Perspectives on supports needed to help improve and sustain coordination, collaboration, and communication between Head Start programs and districts/elementary schools for effective transitions
	Coord		Coordination
	Collab		Collaboration
	Comm		Communication
	SpecPop		For specific populations
		Trauma	Exposure to trauma
		SpecNeeds	Special education needs
		CultLang	Cultural and linguistic diversity
		Cwinv	Child welfare involved

Parent Code	Child Code	Grandchild Code	Definition
Trans_SuppInternal			Description of supports needed within an agency (Head Start or LEA) to support transitions (e.g., staffing needs, other kinds of resource needs (time, technology, space))
COVID_ChildEnroll			Description of how COVID-19 impacted child enrollments at agency/district
COVID_SuppNeed			Perspectives of supports that would have helped support transitions during COVID-19 pandemic
COVID_SuppFut			Perspectives on how supports may address challenges in future
REFLECT			Head Start or LEA reflections on their own work and/or how the work they do is perceived by those they partner/collaborate with
OTHER			Use for excerpts that present information that may have relevance
OTHER_AREA_IMPROVE			Head Start or LEA reflections or recommendations about what could be improved or done differently
OTHER_Challenge			Any description of challenges experienced
OTHER_Success			Any description of successes experienced

Appendix C: Case-Specific Results from the Staff Collaboration Survey

Case 1

Head Start participants and LEA district administrators tended to report that their collaboration with individuals from both Head Start and the LEA was both frequent and instrumental. The Head Start grantee/delegate staff member and LEA district administrators collaborated with teachers and staff on the Head Start side and those collaborations were both frequent and highly instrumental, as average ratings tended to equal 4 or greater. This represents meeting at least monthly and “very” instrumental collaborations, respectively.

Within this case, we note the difference between the kindergarten teachers and the Head Start teachers and staff. The kindergarten teachers reported that their collaboration with Head Start and LEA employees happens less frequently, and is less instrumental, than what Head Start teachers and staff reported.

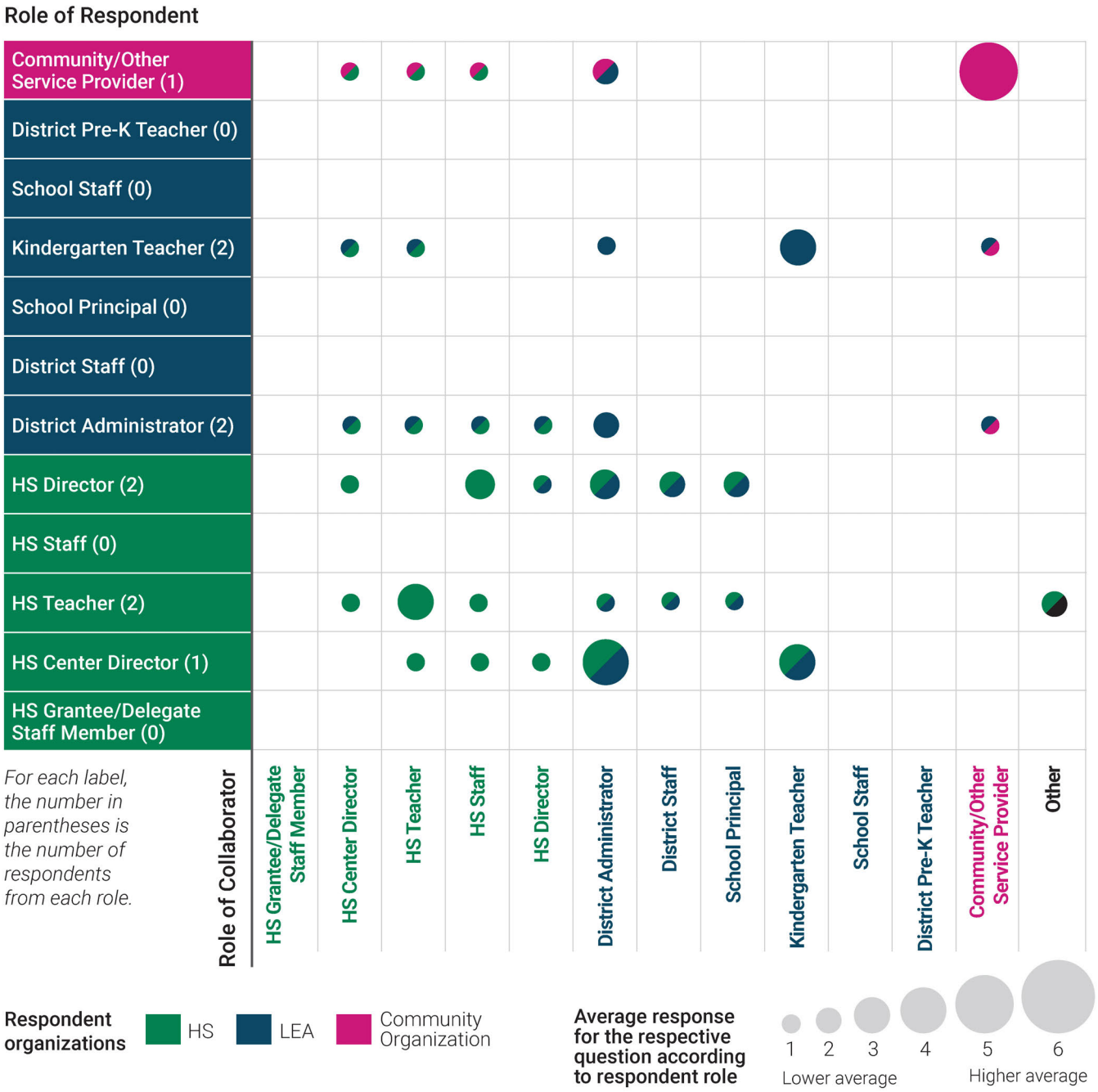
Figure C-1. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 1

Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 1

We asked case studies staff participants in both Head Start (HS) and Local Education Agencies (LEA): "Who do you collaborate with most closely, both inside and outside your organization or school, to support children and families for the transition from Head Start to kindergarten?"

Number of Collaborators

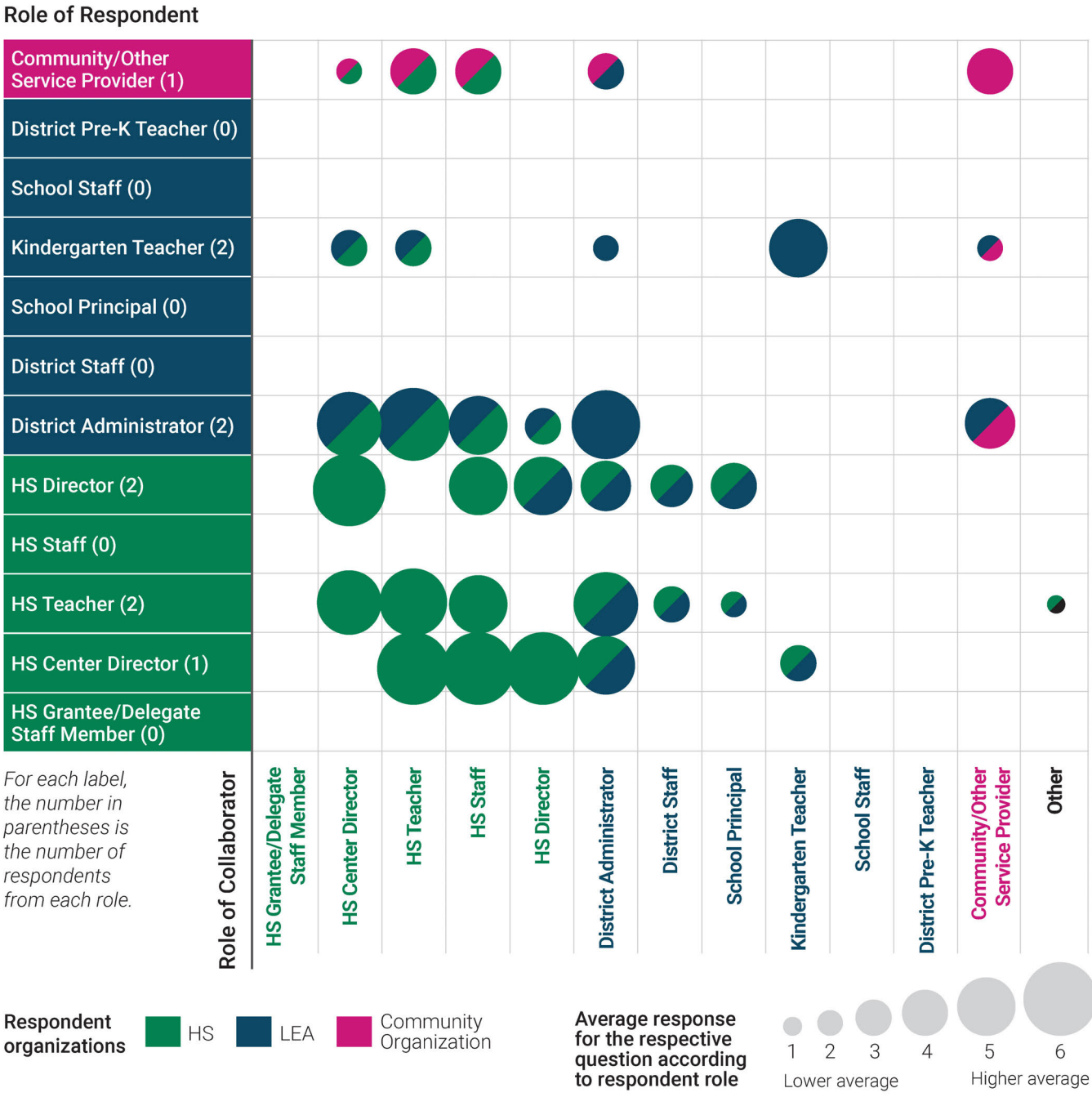
The number in each box indicates the average number of times a respondent listed collaborators.



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 1 cont.

Frequency

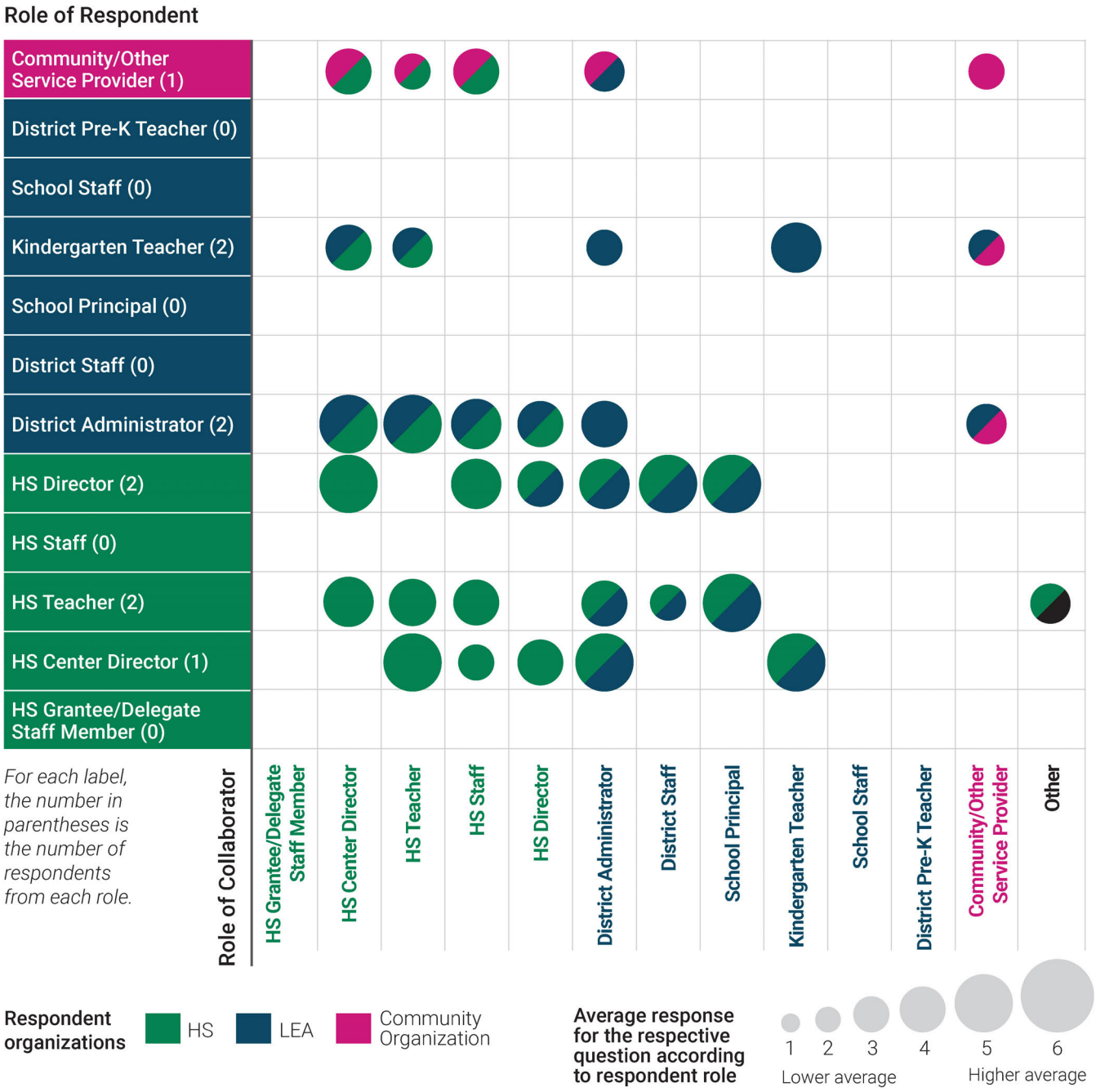
The number in each box indicates the average frequency of collaboration, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Less than once a year, once a year, once a quarter, once a month, once a week, more than once a week



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 1 cont.

Instrumental

The number in each box indicates the average rating of how instrumental a collaboration was, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Not at all instrumental, slightly instrumental, somewhat instrumental, very instrumental



Case 2

Among staff in this case, we see that Head Start staff and the Head Start Center Director listed collaborators from both Head Start and the LEA. In contrast, the LEA staff primarily listed other LEA staff. This trend continues into frequency of collaboration. In the Frequency graph, we see that within-site collaborations happen more frequently than between-site collaborations. However, cross-site collaborations were reported as “very” to “highly” instrumental (average ratings of 4/5 to 5/5). The Head Start staff in this case rank their collaborations with LEA staff as “extremely instrumental,” and LEA district administrators rank their collaboration with Head Start staff as “very” to “extremely instrumental.”

In this case study, we see that Head Start Staff reported frequent and instrumental collaborations with each other and with LEA employees. Those collaborations were more frequent with Head Start staff, but collaborations with LEA employees were slightly more instrumental. District administrators also collaborated across both sites. We also see that Kindergarten teachers reported frequent and instrumental with each other and with other school staff. Kindergarten teachers had instrumental interactions with Community Service Providers as well.

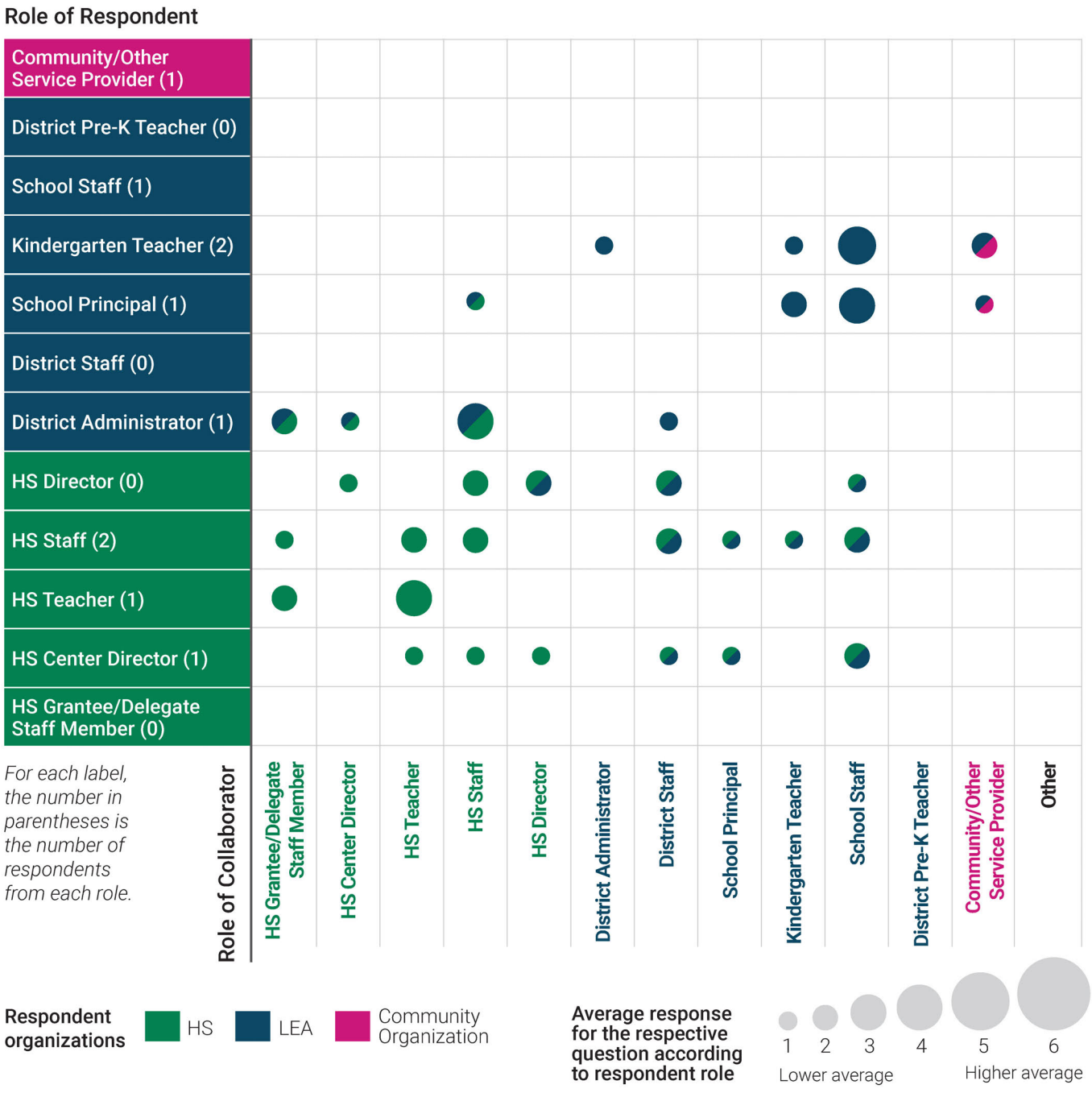
Figure C-2. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 2

Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 2

We asked case studies staff participants in both Head Start (HS) and Local Education Agencies (LEA): "Who do you collaborate with most closely, both inside and outside your organization or school, to support children and families for the transition from Head Start to kindergarten?"

Number of Collaborators

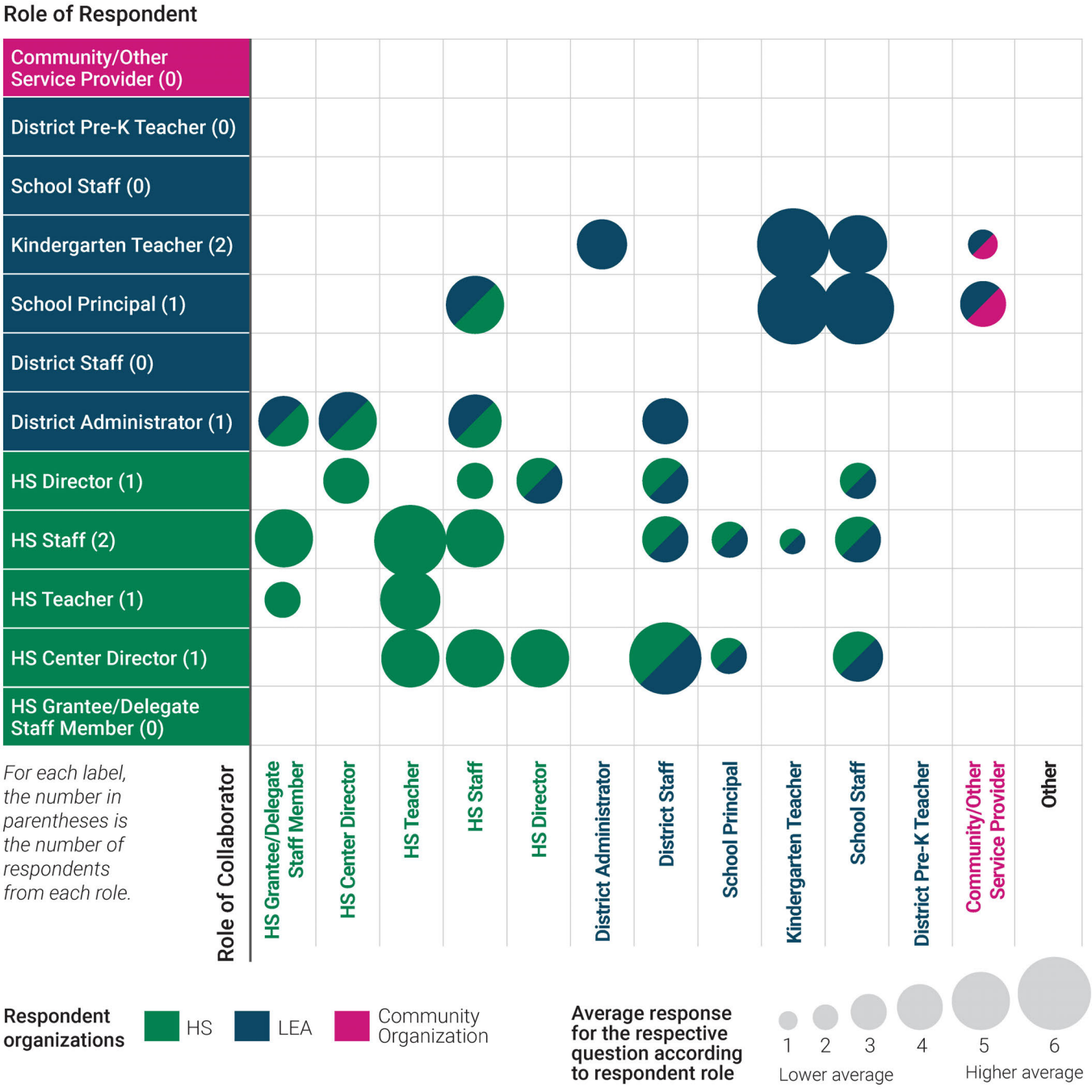
The number in each box indicates the average number of times a respondent listed collaborators.



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 2 cont.

Frequency

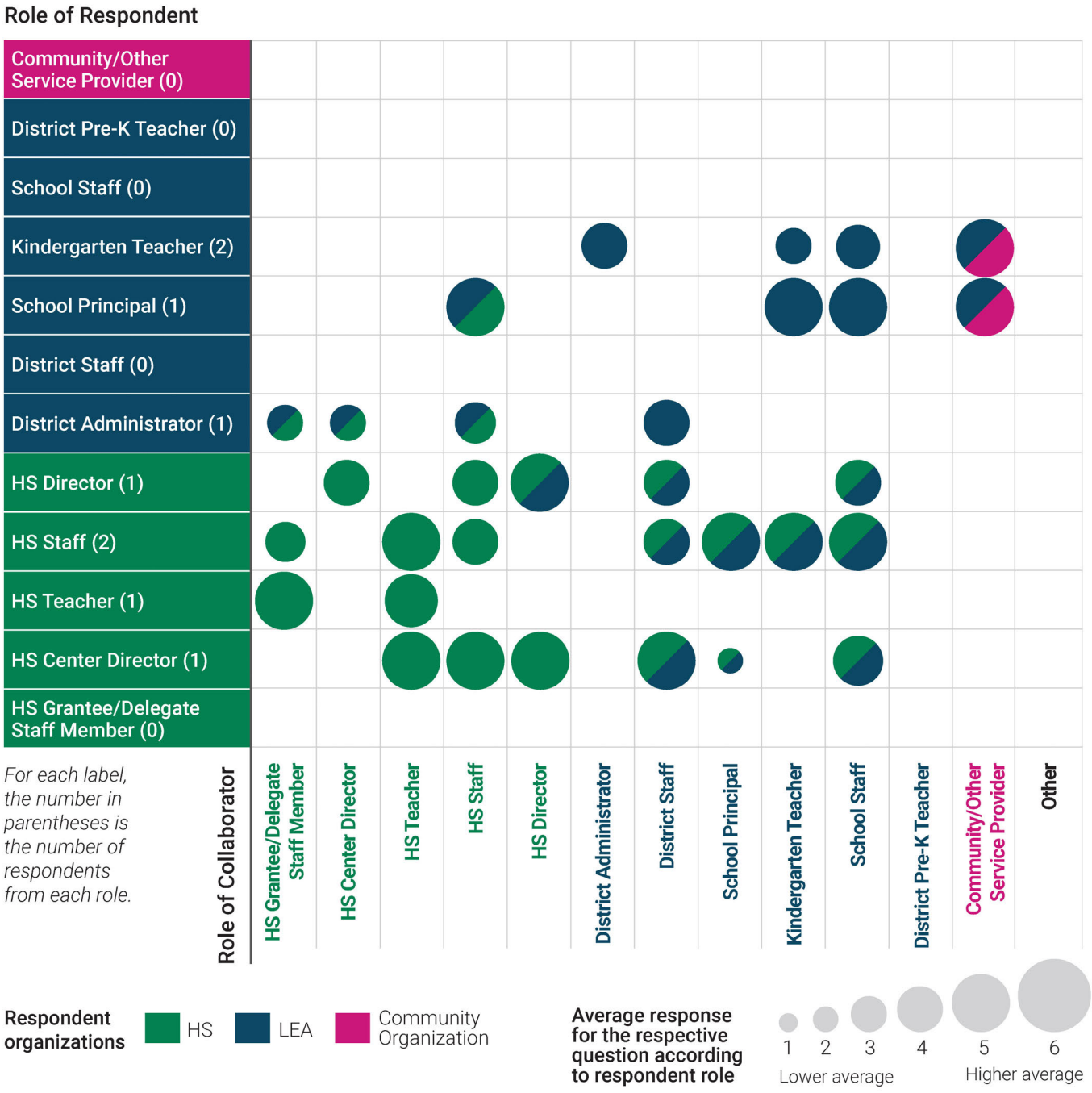
The number in each box indicates the average frequency of collaboration, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Less than once a year, once a year, once a quarter, once a month, once a week, more than once a week



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 2 cont.

Instrumental

The number in each box indicates the average rating of how instrumental a collaboration was, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Not at all instrumental, slightly instrumental, somewhat instrumental, very instrumental



Case 3

Within this case, we see that most roles interacted with the Head Start Center Director and Head Start staff members, and these interactions were rated as “very” (4/5) to “extremely instrumental” (5/5). Different types of Head Start employees all reported collaborating primarily with other Head Start employees, along with an LEA district administrator and district staff member. On the LEA side, the district administrator and school principal reported more collaborations across organizations, while kindergarten teachers and school staff only reported within-organization collaborations.

We see a great deal of collaboration between the LEA principal, kindergarten teachers, and school staff. These collaborations are highly instrumental (typically rated 5/5), with kindergarten teachers interacting with each other more than once a week (6/6).

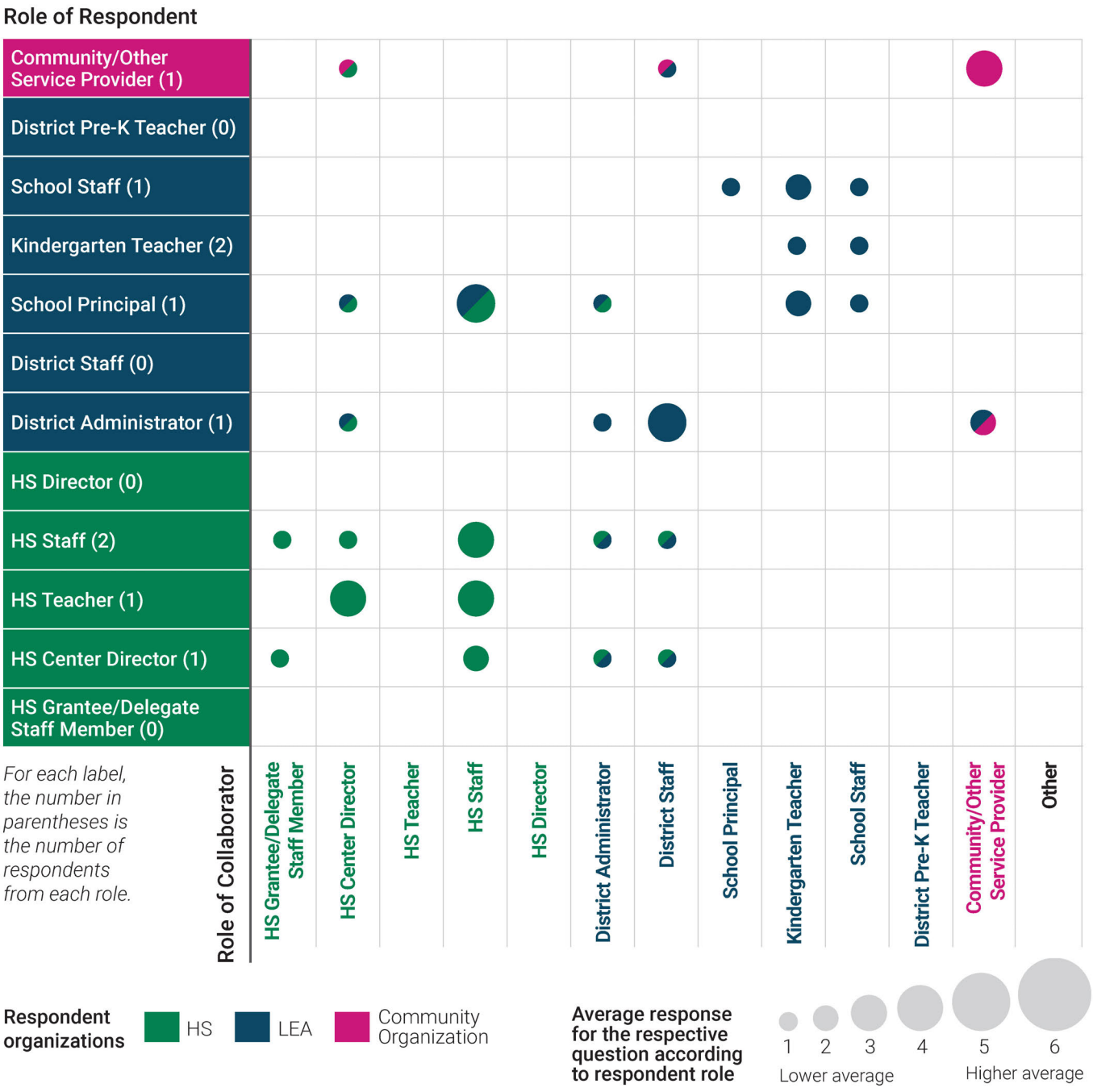
Figure C-3. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 3

Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 3

We asked case studies staff participants in both Head Start (HS) and Local Education Agencies (LEA): "Who do you collaborate with most closely, both inside and outside your organization or school, to support children and families for the transition from Head Start to kindergarten?"

Number of Collaborators

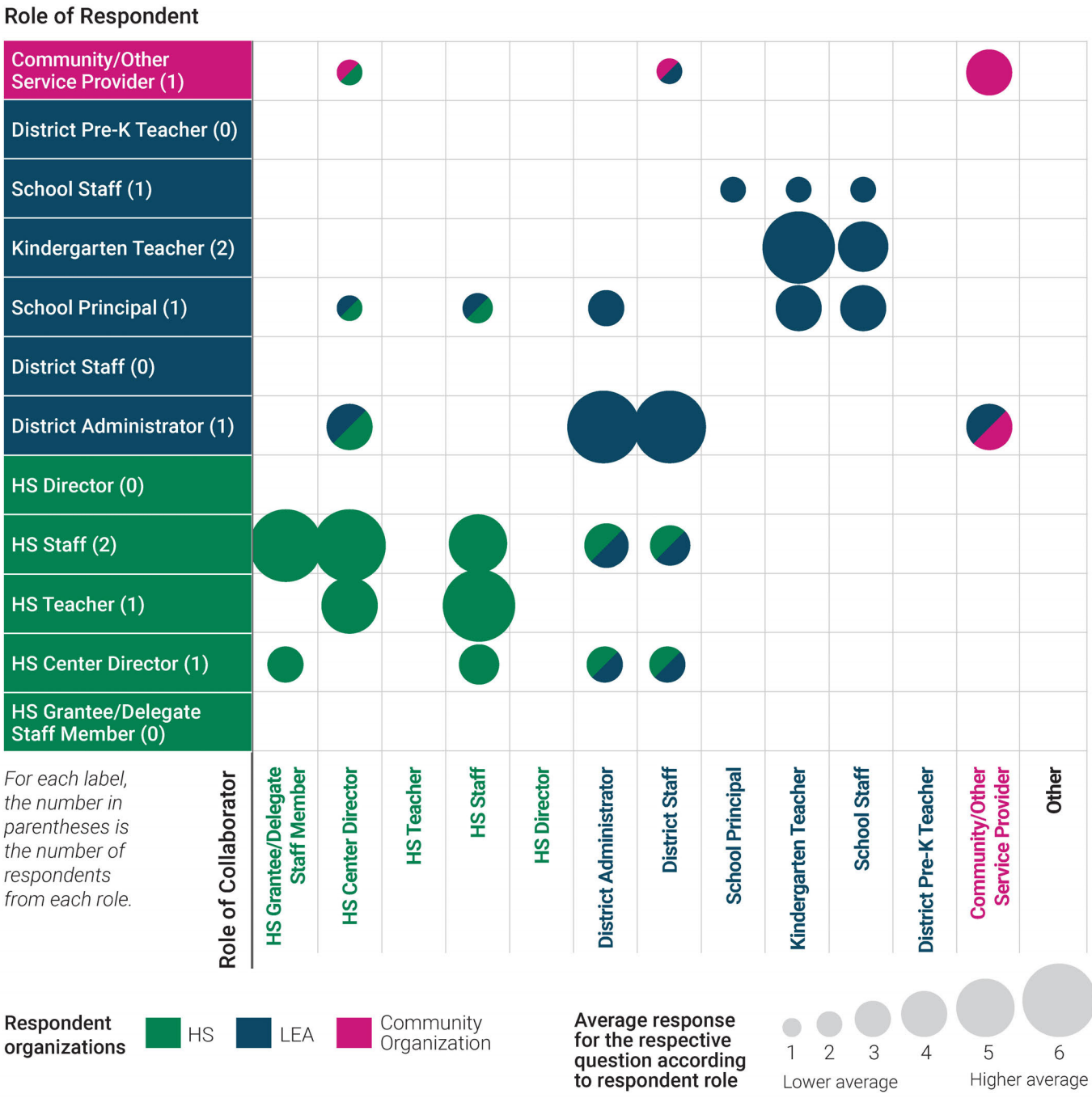
The number in each box indicates the average number of times a respondent listed collaborators.



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 3 cont.

Frequency

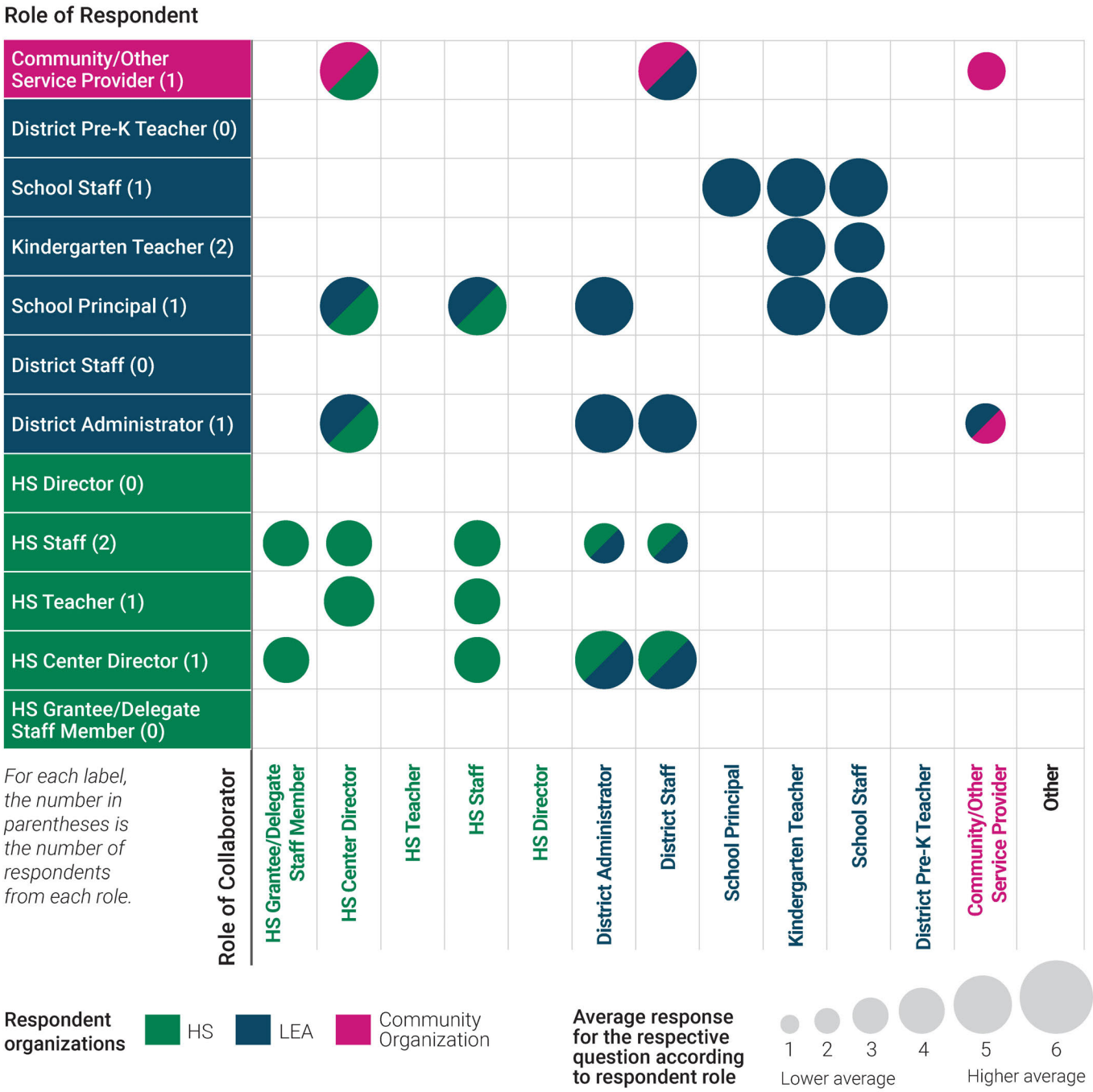
The number in each box indicates the average frequency of collaboration, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Less than once a year, once a year, once a quarter, once a month, once a week, more than once a week



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 3 cont.

Instrumental

The number in each box indicates the average rating of how instrumental a collaboration was, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Not at all instrumental, slightly instrumental, somewhat instrumental, very instrumental



Case 4

Within this case, Head Start employees collaborated with individuals that are spread across both Head Start and the LEA, but reported that collaborations within Head Start are somewhat more frequent and instrumental than collaborations with the LEA. For example, Head Start staff reported collaborating with other Head Start teachers once a week (average rating of 5/6) but collaborated with kindergarten teachers once a quarter (average rating of 3/6). There were only two LEA employees who responded to the survey, but both reported collaborating with individuals from both Head Start and the LEA.

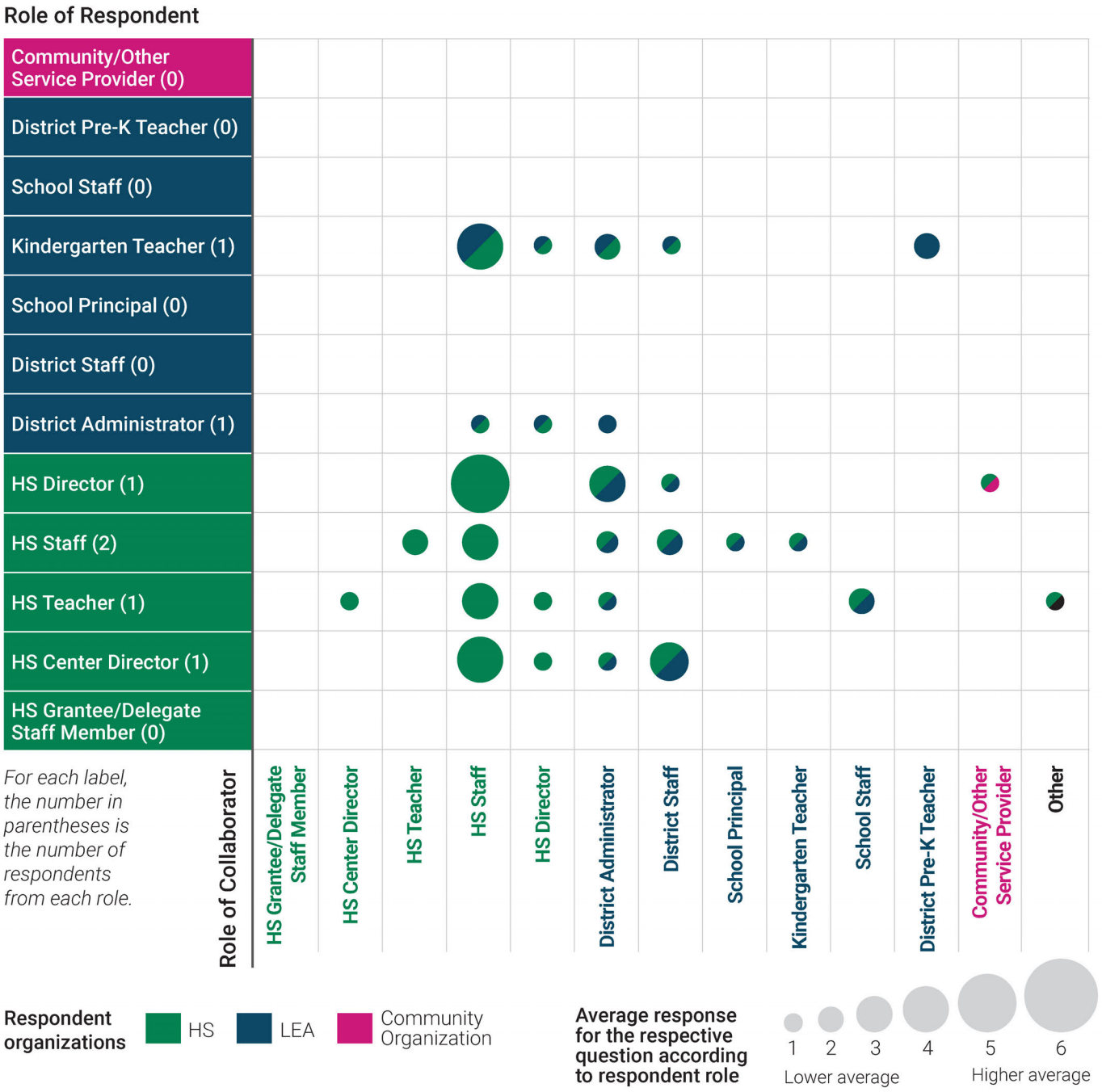
Figure C-4. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 4

Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 4

We asked case studies staff participants in both Head Start (HS) and Local Education Agencies (LEA): "Who do you collaborate with most closely, both inside and outside your organization or school, to support children and families for the transition from Head Start to kindergarten?"

Number of Collaborators

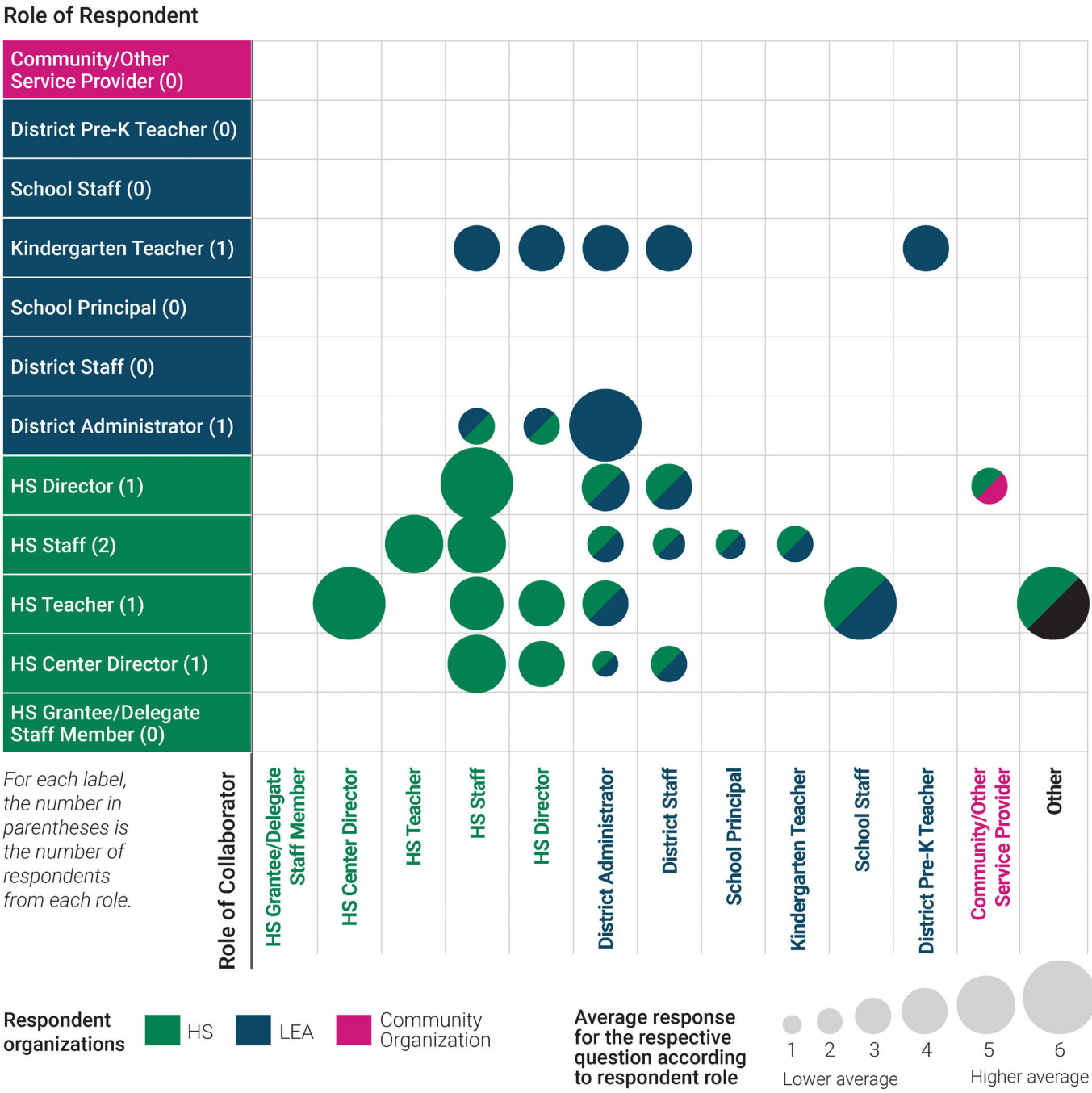
The number in each box indicates the average number of times a respondent listed collaborators.



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 4 cont.

Frequency

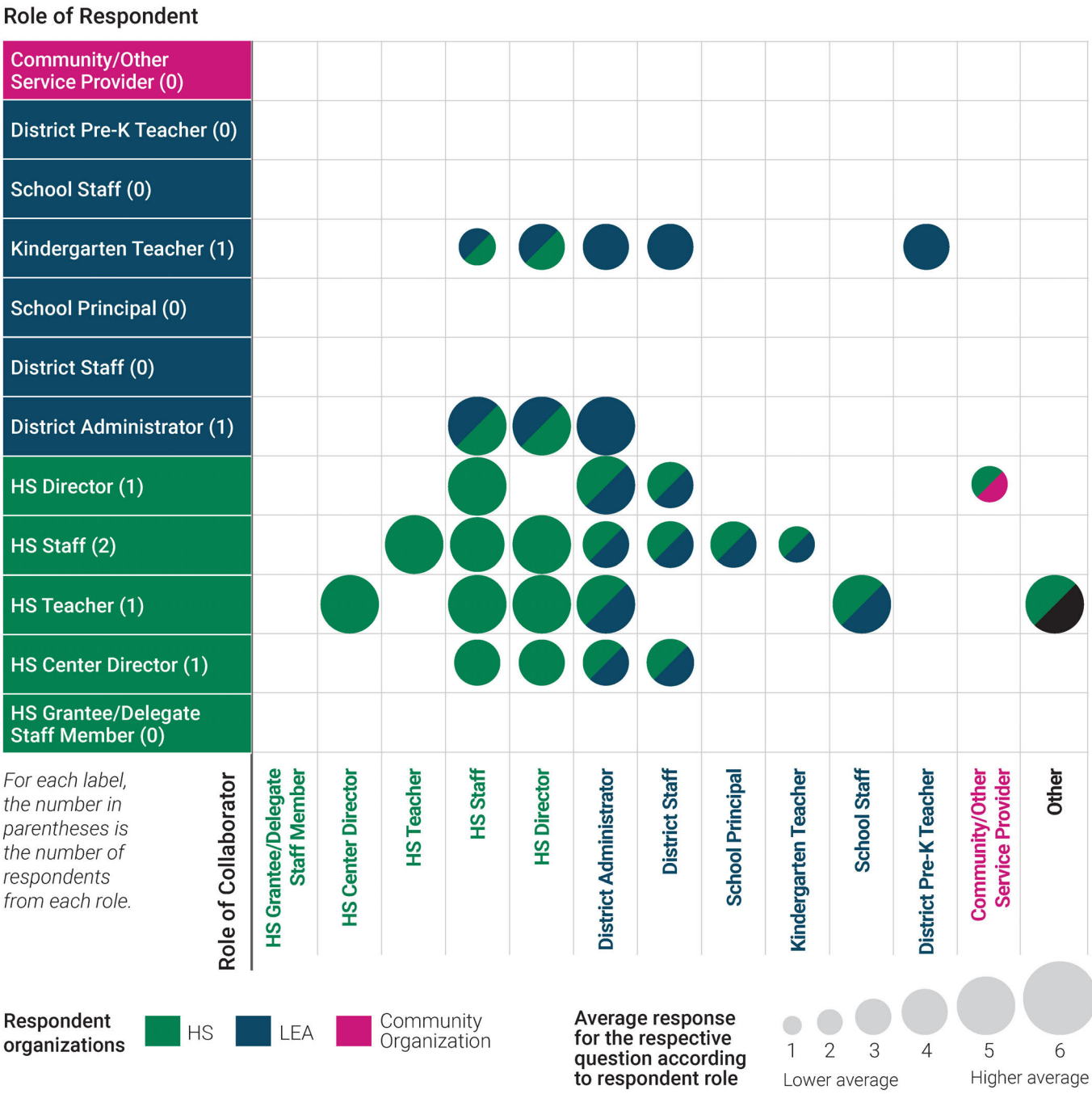
The number in each box indicates the average frequency of collaboration, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Less than once a year, once a year, once a quarter, once a month, once a week, more than once a week



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 4 cont.

Instrumental

The number in each box indicates the average rating of how instrumental a collaboration was, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Not at all instrumental, slightly instrumental, somewhat instrumental, very instrumental



Case 5

Within this case, individuals in leadership roles on both the Head Start and the LEA side reported collaborating with numerous individuals across both sites. The Head Start Director collaborated with people in most of the other roles but reported that their collaborations were most frequent (once a month; 4/6) and instrumental (somewhat; 3.3/5) with other Head Start personnel. District administrators reported collaborating most frequently with other district administrators and staff (once a week (5.1) and more than once a week (6), respectively), but that their collaborations with Head Start Center Directors and staff were most instrumental ("very" (4) to "extremely," (4.5), respectively). Head Start staff reported that their collaborations with each other and with district staff were frequent (average ratings above 4/6) and instrumental (average ratings above 4/5).

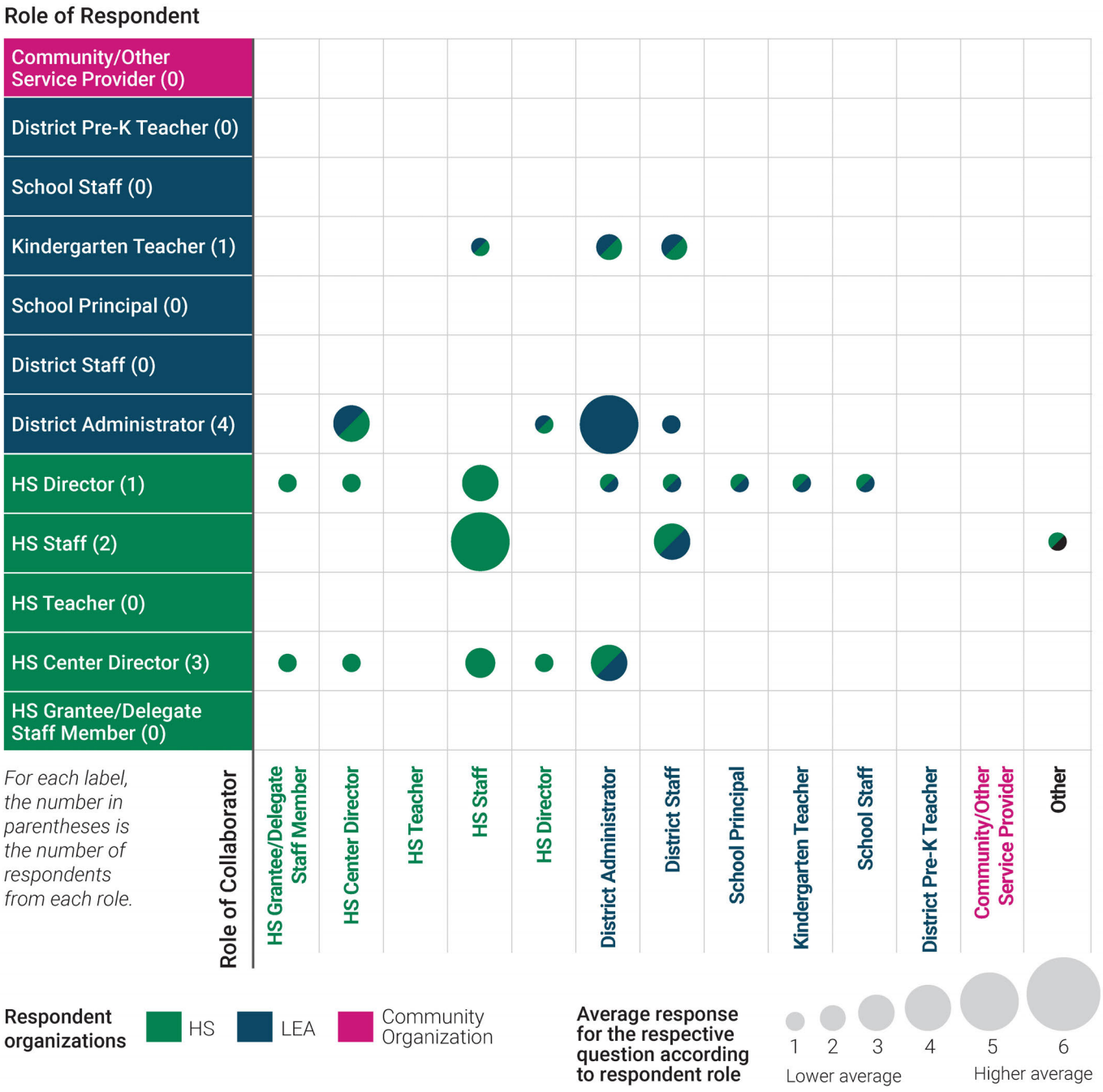
Figure C-5. Staff Collaboration Survey Results for Case 5

Summary of Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 5

We asked case studies staff participants in both Head Start (HS) and Local Education Agencies (LEA): "Who do you collaborate with most closely, both inside and outside your organization or school, to support children and families for the transition from Head Start to kindergarten?"

Number of Collaborators

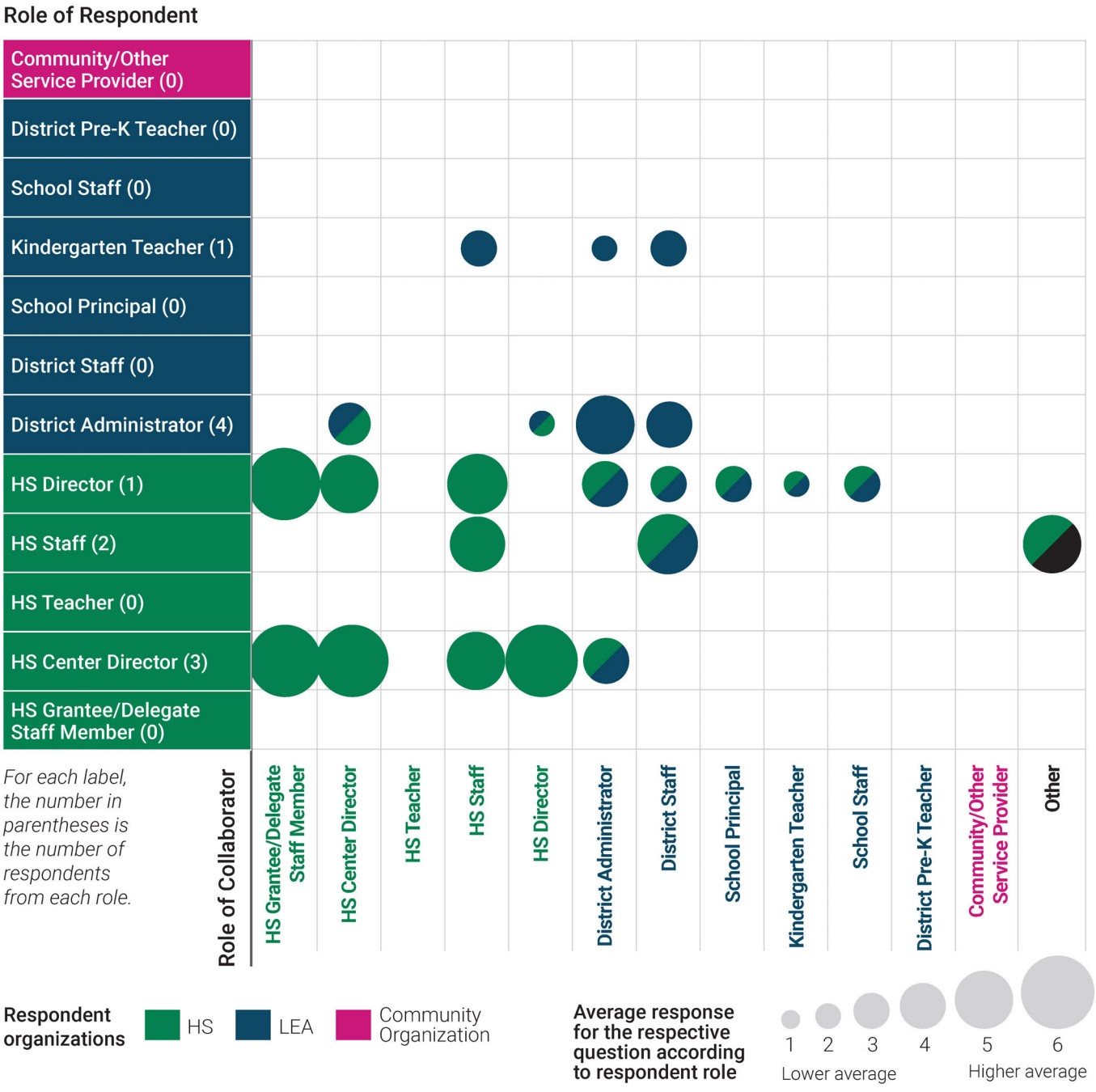
The number in each box indicates the average number of times a respondent listed collaborators.



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 5 cont.

Frequency

The number in each box indicates the average frequency of collaboration, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Less than once a year, once a year, once a quarter, once a month, once a week, more than once a week



Staff Collaboration Survey Results: Case 5 cont.

Instrumental

The number in each box indicates the average rating of how instrumental a collaboration was, provided by a respondent for a collaborator: Not at all instrumental, slightly instrumental, somewhat instrumental, very instrumental

